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Allegiances-MoonClan

[image] [image]

***Leader* Clawstar**-A dark grey tabby tom with yellow eyes
***Deputy* Splashfoot**-A white and light ginger she-cat with blue eyes and dark ginger paws
***Med. Cat* Greeneyes**-A thick furred white tom with light green eyes and a torn ear
Apprentice, Oatwhisker
Warriors
Snowpelt-A small white she-cat with pale green eyes
Apprentice, Nightpaw
Rainclaw-A dark blue tabby tom with green eyes and a scar over his left eye
Zebrahstripe-A stripped black and white tom with yellow eyes
Patchpelt-A black and white she-cat with with a bobtail and blue eyes
Tigerlily-A black and ginger she-cat with amber eyes
Cheetahclaw-A black and tan spotted tom with long sharp claws and yellow eyes
Mistytail-A light gray tabby she-cat with icy blue eyes white paws
Pepperclaw-A black and white tom with yellow eyes and a stubby tail
Apprentice, Steampaw
Birchfeather-A pale brown tom with amber eyes
Featherfoot-A silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes and light gray paws
Darkear-A black tom with one brown ear and green eyes
Berryheart-A white and gray she-cat with green eyes and a long fluffy tail
Apprentice, Snowpaw
Darkfur-A pitch black tom with pale yellow eyes
Queens
Applefur-A brown queen with green eyes(Mother to **Mousekit**-A light brown tabby she-cat with green eyes and **Pebblekit**-A light gray tabby tom with yellow eyes)
Apprentices

Oatwhisker-A light brown tabby tom with golden yellow eye (Medicine Cat apprentice)
Nightpaw-A black tom with icy blue eyes
Snowpaw-A white she-cat with yellow eyes and black paws
Steampaw-A light gray tom with amber eyes and dark gray spots and tail tip
Elders:
Copperpelt-A dark ginger she-cat with faded yellow eyes and white paws
Nutwhisker-A pale brown tabby tom with green eyes

Roll Call-SunClan

[image]

***Leader* Ratstar**-dark brown tom with glowing amber eyes
***Deputy* Bumblescar**-loght gray tom with a scar over his left eye
***Med. Cat* Buzzardwhisker**-brown tabby tom with green eyes
Warriors
Cedarclaw-dark brown tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Pollenpaw
Cheetahfoot-spotted brown she-cat with amber eyes
Cherryfur-dark ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Finchpaw
Cindersplash-gray tom with white paws and blue eyes
Dovetail-silver tabby she-cat with green eyes
Duckwing-golden brown tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Eggpaw
Chestnutheart-tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Emberpaw
Eagleclaw-brown and white she-cat with yellow eyes
Talonfang-black she-cat with green eyes
Duskfeather-dark brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Apprentice, Ivypaw
Dustpelt-dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Falconpaw
Queens
Ebonyfoot-dark brown tabby with amber eyes (Mother to Pollenkit-white tom with blue eyes and Flowerkit-brown and white she-cat wit amber eyes)
Echowing-brown and white she-cat with blue eyes (Mother to Nectarkit-pale orange she-cat with green eyes and Sunkit-light ginger she-cat with yellow eyes)
Eelsting-light gray tabby with blue eyes (Mother to Riverkit-silver tom with a long fluffy tail and blue eyes, Marshkit-light brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes and Nightkit-black she-cat with green eyes)
Apprentices
Pollenpaw-dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Finchpaw-white she-cat with violet eyes
Eggpaw-cream colored she-cat with blue eyes
Emberpaw-dark ginger tom with yellow eyes
Falconpaw-dark brown tabby tom with green eyes
Ivypaw-gray she-cat with amber eyes

Allegiances-NightClan

[image]

Leader **Nutstar**—dark brown tabby tom with green eyes
Deputy **Coldfoot**—white tom with green eyes and a twisted paw
Apprentice, Nutpaw
Med. Cat **Copperfur**—dark ginger tom with blue eyes and a fluffy tail
Warriors
Thistlestorm—light brown tabby she-cat with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Otterpaw
Whiteclaw—white tom with amber eyes
Speckledbelly—gray speckled she-cat with blue eyes
Apprentice, Nosepaw
Softpelt–gray and white she-cat with green eyes
Snowwhisker—white she-cat with blue eyes
Beechnose—golden tabby tom with creamy stripes, a pink nose and blue eyes
Frozengaze—a blind tabby and white she-cat with blue eyes
Rustyfur—dark ginger tom with green eyes
Rivertail—dark gray tabby she-cat with a fluffy tail and green eyes
Whitewind—a white tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Splashpaw
Treeblaze—dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Foxheart—dark ginger and white she-cat with amber eyes
Yellowglow—black tom with yellow eyes
Frozenwing—gray and white she-cat with green eyes
Queens
Spottedthistle—light brown and dark brown tabby she-cat with blue eyes(Mother to Birchkit—light brown she-cat with blue eyes)
Acornsplash—brown she-cat with white ear, tail tip, shoulders and legs and blue eyes(Mother to Aspenkit-gray tabby she-cat with green eyes and Oatkit—brown tabby tom with green eyes)

Apprentices

Nutpaw—brown she-cat with yellow eyes
Otterpaw—brown and white tom with green eyes
Nosepaw—cream colored she-cat with blue eyes
Splashpaw—ginger and white she-cat with amber eyes

Allegiances-RuneClan

[image]

Leader **Smokestar**—fluffy black she-cat with green eyes
Deputy **Blazewhisker**—dark ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Med. Cat **Stormbelly**—dark gray tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Warriors

Ravenfur—black tom with blue eyes
Blackpelt—black she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Coldpaw
Riversong—golden tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Redfang—dark ginger tom with hooked teeth and amber eyes

Cloverdapple-tortoiseshell she-cat with pale green eyes

Hazelnose—gray and white tom with a punk nose and blue eyes

Sharpeye—white she-cat with yellow eyes
Dawnclaw—pale gray she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Oakpaw
Quailfoot—black and white time it yellow eyes
Pebbleclaw—light gray tom wit amber eyes
Nightstorm—black tom with blue eyes
Skywhisker—white and gray tom with green eyes
Lightningclaw—white tom with blue eyes

Queens

Flowertail—tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Skykit-tortoiseshell and white shecat with pale green eyes and Grasskit-very pale ginger she-cat with green eyes and darker specks)
Cloudfeather—gray and white she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Patchkit-brown and black tom with amber eyes and Featherkit-silver tabby she-cat with dark blue eyes)

Apprentices

Coldpaw—gray and white tom wit yellow eyes
Oakpaw—dark brown tabby tom with green eyes

Elders

Liontalon—golden tabby tom with amber eyes
Bluefur—light gray she-cat with yellow eyes
Stormtail—dark gray tabby tom with green eyes

Allegiances-RainClan

[image]

Leader **Blackstar**—black and white tom with yellow eyes
Deputy **Tigerstripe**—dark brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Med. Cat **Goosetail**—dark gray tom with yellow eyes
Warriors
Quickfeet—gray and white she-cat with amber eyes
Rabbitwhisker—brown and white tom with green eyes
Apprentice, Barkpaw
Adderfang—brown tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Aspenpaw
Eagleheart—brown and white she-cat with yellow eyes
Applepelt—ginger she-cat with green eyes
Silverwave—silver tabby she-cat with green eyes
Bumblestripe—black and ginger tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Smokestorm—black and gray tabby tom with black paws and blue eyes
Rowanpool—dark russet she-cat with a white underbelly and paws and green eyes
Apprentice, Birchpaw
Haybelly—cream colored tom with a white underbelly and yellow eyes
Emberstripe—dark ginger tabby tom with amber eyes
Amberpelt—ginger and white she-cat with blue eyes
Wolfshadow—thick pelted gray tom with green eyes
Antfawn—tortoiseshell she-cat with pale green eyes
Apprentice, Badgerpaw
Queens
Archfeather—gray and white she-cat with yellow eyes and one black paw (Mother to Redkit-dark ginger tom with a flame colored pelt and yellow eyes)
Ashfur—light gray she-cat with dark gray specks and green eyes (Mother to Wolfkit-speckked gray tom with blue eyes and Foxkit-russet colored tom with a white underbelly and darker paws and green eyes)

Apprentices

Barkpaw—dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Aspenpaw—light brown she-cat with blue eyes
Badgerpaw—black and white she-cat with blue eyes
Birchpaw—white she-cat with blue eyes

Elders

Gorsethroat—dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes and a white muzzle

Roll Call-ClawClan

[image]

Leader **Cougarstar**—massive light ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Deputy **Beechclaw**—cream colored tom with green eyes
Med. Cat **Berryfoot**—tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes
Warriors
Birdfang—dark brown tom with yellow eyes
Blindeye—ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes, blind in one eye
Featherbrook—silver tabby she-cat with green eyes
Otterblaze—ginger and white tom with green eyes
Blackwing—small, black she-cat with yellow eyes
Fuzzypelt—fluffy black tom with yellow eyes
Stonetalon—gray tom with blue eyes
Blossomstorm—brown and white she-cat with blue eyes
Brightrose—russet and white she-cat with blue eyes
Blizzardfur—thick furred white tom with green eyes
Copperfoot—white she-cat with ginger paws and yellow eyes
Hazelflame—light brown she-cat with violet eyes
Bloodclaw— dark ginger tom with dark amber eyes
Willowsong—light gray tabby she-cat with a white underbelly and blue eyes
Tumbleshade—tan colored tom wit green eyes and a stumpy tail
Thunderstrike—black and gray striped tom with yellow eyes

Apprentice, Raccoonpaw
Snakeflare—dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes
Dawnrise—light ginger she-cat with amber eyes

Eagleflight—light brown tabby tom with blue eyes

Apprentices

Raggedpaw—mottled dark brown tom with amber eyes

Raccoonpaw—gray she-cat with a black mask and amber eyes

Elders

Bonetail—gray and white she-cat with a half of a tail and blue eyes

Roll Call-SkyClan

[image]

Leader **Boulderstar**—silver tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Deputy **Buzzardtail**—dark ginger and white she-cat with blue eyes
Med. Cat **Owlface**—brown tom with a white head and blue eyes
Warriors
Shadetail—gray tom with black tail and amber eyes
Owlclaw—brown tabby tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Tigerpaw
Skybreeze—gray and white she-cat with blue eyes
Lunanose—black she-cat with a striking pink nose and green eyes
Kindlestripe—dark brown tabby she-cat with green eyes
Stormwhistle—tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes
Moonclaw-—light gray tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Longpaw
Roughpelt—ragged brown tom wit yellow eyes
Coldstone—black she-cat with blue eyes
Mistlily—gray and white she-cat with blue eyes
Bouncetail—black tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Leafpaw
Sharpclaw—dark ginger tom with yellow eyes
Snowpool—pure white she-cat with blue eyes
Lilymist—light gray tabby she-cat with yellow eyes
Palefur—pale gray tom with blue eyes
Scarfire—ginger tom with furless paws and blue eyes
Queens
Crystalheart—black she-cat with violet eyes

(Mother to Boulderkit-very dark gray tom with blue eyes and Mistkit-black she-cat with blue eyes)

Moonpelt—cream colored she-cat with dark blue eyes (Mother to Tigerkit-white tom with tbby splashes and dark blue eyes and Birdkit-pale brown tabby she-cat with yellow eyes)

Foxwhisper—ginger and white she-cat with yellow eyes (Mother to Petalkit-tortoiseshell she-cat with distinctive ginger marks and yellow eyes and Mosskit-black and white tom with blue eyes)

Apprentices

Tigerpaw—dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Longpaw—long limbed black tom with yellow eyes

Leafpaw—brown and white she-cat with green eyes

Elders

Nightmist—blind black she-cat with a torn ear and blue eyes

Roll Call-SoulClan

[image]

Leader **Bouncestar**—energetic ginger she-cat with yellow eyes
Deputy **Squirrelflower**—ginger she-cat with yellow eyes
Med. Cat **Spottedheart**—tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Warriors

Icywind—white tom with green eyes
Weaselfur—brown tom with yellow eyes

Puddleclaw—gray tom with yellow eyes
Stoneclaw—gray tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Volepaw
Gorseclaw—brown and white tom with blue eyes

Lightblaze—ginger she-cat with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Harepaw
Wildeyes—white tom with one yellow eye and one green eye

Rainpelt—dark gray tabby she-cat with violet eyes

Firetail—ginger tom with yellow eyes
Cloud-drop—white tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Foxpaw
Pebblenose—white she-cat with green eyes
Owlface—brown tom with amber eyes
Stonepelt—gray and black tom with blue eyes

Gingerleaf—tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes
Queens

Grayfoot—white she-cat with gray paws and green eyes (Mother to Whitekit-white tom with a fluffy tail and blue

eyes and Darkkit-gray tom with black stripes on his tail and green eyes)

Apprentices

Volepaw—black she-cat with yellow eyes
Harepaw—tan colored tom with yellow eyes
Foxpaw—dark russet tom with amber eyes

Elders

Waterwind—white she-cat with yellow eyes

Goldentail —golden tabby she-cat with blue eyes

Rool Call-FireClan

[image]

Leader **Brackenstar**—golden brown tabby tom with amber eyes
Deputy **Moonwhisker**—white tom with blue eyes
Med. Cat **Larkwing**—black she-cat with amber eyes
Warriors
Hazeltail—brown she-cat with green eyes
Silverstripe—silver tabby she-cat with green eyes
Redheart—russet tom with amber eyes
Smallmoon—small white she-cat with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Frostpaw
Cloverleaf—tortoiseshell she-cat with pale yellow eyes
Mossfur—brown and white tom with blue eyes
Birdpelt—black tom with yellow eyes
Leafwhisker—brown and white she-cat with yellow eyes
Leopardsong—spotted brown tom with blue eyes
Speckledrock—speckled gray she-cat with yellow eyes
Tawnywhisker—brown and ginger she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Hailpaw
Silverstone—gray tom with yellow eyes
Icewhisker—white tom with yellow eyes
Reedclaw—brown she-cat with blue eyes
Dawnwhisker—ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Feathertail—silver tabby she-cat with green eyes and a long, fluffy tail
Queens
Fastwing—gray tabby she-cat with green eyes

(Mother to Swiftkit-gray and white she-cat with green eyes and Heatkit-dark ginger tom with one white paw and amber eyes)

Frostwing—white she-cat with blue eyes (Mother to Icekit-white she at with blue eyes)

Apprentices

Frostpaw—small white she-cat with blue eyes

Hailpaw—large gray tom with blue eyes

Elders

Eaglefur—dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes

Yellowsong—ginger tom with yellow eyes

Fogpelt—gray tabby tom with blue eyes

Crowstorm—black tom with violet eyes

Roll Clan-TwilightClan

[image]

Leader **Bramblestar**—brown tabby tom wit green eyes
Deputy **Addertooth**—brown she-cat with a snaggled tooth and yellow eyes
Med. Cat **Redfern**—tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes
Warriors
Windybreeze—ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Eveningshadow—black tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Moonpaw
Gorgeclaw—brown tom with blue eyes
Darkstorm—black she-cat with yellow eyes
Ashflower—gray spotted she-cat with blue eyes
Shatteredmoon—black and white she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Stormpaw
Rosebloom—ginger she-cat with amber eyes
Shadowheart—gray tom with blue eyes
Darkriver—dark gray tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Morningshade—gray she-cat with green eyes
Nightblaze—black she-cat with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Willowpaw
Swiftfoot—black and white tom with blue eyes
Queens
Jaggedpeak—black she-cat with yellow eyes (Mother to Hawkkit-dark brown tabby tom with amber eyes and Splashkit-tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes)
Scarletstreak—dark ginger she-cat with amber eyes (Expecting Gorgeclaw's kits)
Apprentices
Moonpaw—gray spotted she-cat with blue eyes
Stormpaw—dark gray tom with green eyes
Willowpaw—gray tabby she-cat with yellow eyes
Elders

Goldenheart—ginger she-cat with blue eyes
Orangestripe—blind ginger tom
Mistyleaf—tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes

Roll Call-DesertClan

[image]

Leader **Bravestar**—sandy gray tom with green eyes
Deputy **Amberfur**—ginger tabby she-cat with green eyes
Med. Cat **Leafcloud**—dark brown tabby tom with green eyes
Warriors

Meerkatmask—tan she-cat with black paws, mask and blue eyes

Streakpelt—black and white tom with blue eyes

Dewpelt—light brown she-cat with blue eyes
Whisperheart—white she-cat with blue eyes
Whitenose—black tom with a white nose and yellow eyes

Apprentice, Birdpaw
Cliffblaze—brown tabby she-cat with blue eyes
Pigeonpelt—gray and white tom with yellow eyes

Finchfur—light brown tom with yellow eyes
Apprentice, Smokepaw
Russet-tail—ginger she-cat with yellow eyes
Icywind—white tom with yellow eyes
Shallow-waters—white tom with light blue eyes

Spidersnap—black and brown tom with amber eyes

Wingflight—gray tabby she-cat with green eyes
Thornclaw—black tom with green eyes
Spottedheart—tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Doveheart—gray she-cat with amber eyes
Leopardwing—spotted gray tom with blue eyes
Queens

Spottedfish—dappled gray she-cat with green

eyes (Mother to Tawnykit-tortoiseshell she-cat with blue eyes) and Hutchkit-light gray tabby tom with blue eyes)

Blackwhisker—black she-cat with green eyes (Mother to Tankit-cream colored tom with green eyes and black paws, Sandkit-light gray she-cat with green eyes and Cactuskit-very pale gray tom with dark green eyes)

Honeymist—ginger tabby she-cat with blue eyes (Mother to Berrykit-white she-cat with tabby splashes and blue eyes and Frostkit-white she-cat with ginger splashes and blue eyes)

Apprentices

Birdpaw—brown and white tom with amber eyes

Smokepaw—dark gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Elders

Riverdapple—gray tabby tom with amber eyes

Roll Call-CloudClan

[image]

***Leader* Rainstar**-dark gray tom with blue eyes
***Deputy* Breezefur**-black she-cat with green eyes
***Med. Cat* Briarwhisker**-brown and white she-cat with blue eyes
Warriors
Brightclaw-white tom with long claws and yellow eyes
Brindleflower-brown she-cat with yellow eyes
Lilyshine-tan she-cat with blue eyes
Browntail-brown tabby tom with green eyes
Redtail-brown and ginger tom with yellow eyes
Smallfang-small white tom with green eyes
Brokenheart-dark brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Suntail-ginger and white tom with blue eyes
Brokenclaw-brown tom with a missing claw and blue eyes
Shineflower-silver she-cat with amber eyes
Mousepelt-brown tom with blue eyes
Steamcloud-black and white tom with yellow eyes
Sandstep-light ginger she-cat with green eyes
Apprentice, Robinpaw
Reedflower-brown tabby she-cat with amber eyes
Ripplepelt-black she-cat with blue eyes
Riversplash-gray and white she-cat with blue eyes
Shadowrose-black and white she-cat with green eyes
Heatherheart-tan she-cat with violet eyes
Brighthawk-black and white tom with blue eyes
Queens
Snowdapple-dappled black and white she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Briarkit-long haired white tom with amber eyes)
Honeyfur-ginger she-cat with blue eyes (Mother to Gingerkit-dark ginger tom with amber eyes)
Apprentices
Robinpaw-brown she-cat with a ginger flash on her chest, white paws and blue eyes
Elders
Sunberry-light ginger she-cat with green eyes

Roll Call-DropClan

[image]

***Leader* Ravenstar**-sleek black she-cat with blue eyes and a flash of white on her chest
***Deputy* Clovernose**-tortoiseshell she-cat with amber eyes
***Med. Cat* Fernheart**-light gray tabby tom with green eyes
Warriors
Fennelclaw-gray tabby tom with amber eyes
Apprentice, Lichenpaw
Fawnheart-brown and white she-cat with blue eyes
Heronwing-light brown tom with blue eyes
Firestorm-dark ginger she-cat with amber eyes
Ivyfur-gray and white she-cat with green eyes
Jaywhisker-dark gray tom with blue eyes
Apprentice, Newtpaw
Brindletail-gray she-cat with blue eyes
Willowstripe-gray tabby she-cat with green eyes
Shadowpelt-black tom with yellow eyes
Lionfeather-light ginger tom with yellow eyes
Queens
Heatherblaze-light gray she-cat with blue eyes (Mother to Frogkit-gray she-cat with blue eyes and Nettlekit-brown tom with yellow eyes)
Brittlenose-sleek brown she-cat with amber eyes (Mother to Echokit-black she-cat with amber eyes)
Apprentices
Lichenpaw-light brown she-cat with green eyes
Newtpaw-tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Elders
Tornclaw-dark brown tabby tom with bright yellow eyes
Olivetooth-tortoiseshell she-cat with yellow eyes
Nettlestorm-light brown she-cat with green eyes

Cats Outside Of The Clans

[image]

Sarah—black she-cat with green eyes
Klaus—dark gray tabby tom with blue eyes
Willow—light gray tabby she-cat wit a white underbelly, paws and tail tip and green eyes
Soot—fluffy black tom with a long tail and yellow eyes
Flash—black and white tom with a flat face, long claws and green eyes
Moon—dark gray tom with amber eyes and long sharp claws
Oscar—dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes and a stubby tail
Thorn—a scarred black tom with brown tipped ears and amber eyes
Kara—ginger and white she-cat with blue eyes and large ears
Lily—small brown she-cat with one white paw
Fiona—tortoiseshell she-cat with a broken jaw with green eyes
Slash—massive brown and white tom with a scar running from his ear to his tail and yellow eyes
Dagger—massive gray tom with green eyes
Venom—white tom with violet eyes
Midnight—gray tabby she-cat with a thick black stripe down her back and blue eyes
King—small, golden tabby tom with amber eyes
Beetle—large black tom with blue eyes

Chapter One

[image]

The tiny black kitten stared wide eyed at his mother's motionless body. It lay idly in a makeshift nest of nettles. He tried to new, yet the sound couldn't seem to be able to make it past his throat. That was the thing he saw when he opened his eyes after being born. Now realizing that she was dead, a wail escaped his jaw. He quickly shut his mouth when more whimpering occurred from close by. Turning his small skull to the right, he noticed for the first time he was not alone. Beside him were two mounds of fur: One gray, one black and white. They were both whimpering and shivering from the cold. He, too was cold, but he wouldn't let anyone know that. It was something the weak did. So he huddle between the two and fell asleep.

•••••

The tiny kit was awakened by the cries of a cat. He jumped up, terror rising in his throat and took up the most terrifying look he could muster, ready to fend off whatever beast lurked in his home. He saw no movement from behind the kits, and turned towards his mother's body. There sat a large gray cat licking her fur. His eyes had a look of sorrow, as he would soon find out. The kit managed to growl at the stranger, to which he whipped around. The stranger got to his paws and began towards him, and he hissed in return. The tom, who he would soon learn to be his father, turned his face into one of false happiness, "Aren't you a fighter," He still continued to come closer and the kit found it was no use trying to stop him. He crouched next to the first bundle, the gray one, and sniffed it. He did the same to the black and white one, and then to the conscious one. He smiled to himself and murmured, "Two toms and a she-cat. You did very nicely Sarah."

The kit picked the last part up and decided he should speak, "Sarah? Is that what her name is?" His voice wasn't as vicious as he hoped it would be, but it would do. The older tom's face turned hard. "Was."

With that, he turned his back on the kits and circled his body around Sarah's.

Deciding the stranger was no danger to him or the other kits, he cuddled next to them once more, letting his mind sink into darkness as he fell asleep. He found himself in a dream.

A rancid smell hit his nose and he could feel his heart pounding in his ears. He could hear the shouts and cries of many cats around him, along with different smells. It was all very overwhelming. Sootfur! Sootfur! The cat next to him wailed in his direction. Is that my name? He didn't have time to think about it, because just then a sharp sensation went through his flank, radiating through his body like fire. He whipped around to find the black and white cat attacking him. He then realized that it was the kit he was lying next to right now. But he wasn't a kitten anymore, he was scary. And attacking him! He unsheathed his claws and quickly sliced through his neck fur. He watched as the once gentle kit flopped over, and blood seeped onto the ground. He tried to yell for help, by instead slipped in the slimy stuff and fell into a puddle of blood. The last thing he remembered before waking up was drowning in the red liquid.

He awoke in a cold sweat, and shook his fur to warm himself up. It was only then did he realize how badly his stomach hurt. Then he started to worry. The two kits were gone! He turned all around, and found that the body was missing, too. Starting to panic, the black cat tried calling out to the two cats, but with no reply began to grow stressed. He flopped himself back to the dirt and tried to close his eyes, but memories of blood kept rising back, and he forced himself to keep his eyes open.

Within a few heartbeats, the bushes on the far side of the nest rustled and the stranger from earlier came through, followed by two squealing kits. His eyes widened in surprise and he sauntered calmly over to them to greet the two of his litter, he was still ignoring the older cat, as he refused to be treated in such a way that was unfair.

The gray kitten mewed in a tiny voice, "Klaus took me and Flash out hunting! I think I did a much better job, but Flash did okay,

what did you do while we were away?"

The black kitten's head turned in confusion. "Flash? Klaus? Is that their names?" In return, the gray striped cat laughed. "Of course it is silly, and my name is Willow and you are Soot. Klaus says he is our father and will take care of us. Isn't that right?" She aimed the last part at Klaus, their father. He nodded curtly before dropping the furry animals he had in his mouth at the kittens feet. When all three of the young cats turned their heads away in disgust, he pushed it closer and gave them a nudge, "Go one, take a bite. It's just a squirrel. It will stop the hunger, I promise."

Is that what this pain was called? Hunger? Without another word, Soot took a swift bite of the animal, getting mostly fur, but the meat underneath was warm and moist, and tasted great. And Klaus was right, after three bites his hunger went away and he was left full. He licked the excess fur of the squirrel that had fallen on him out of his coat, and he cuddled up next to the large tom, joining his brother and sister. He didn't quite understand why, but he felt something when they were all together. He didn't know what it was at the time, but it felt warm and soft and left a feeling of numbness throughout his limbs. And he loved it.

Chapter Two

[image]

Soot woke up before his litter mates. Klaus was still snoring softly, signalling that he, too was asleep. He took a heartbeat to look at his family, safe and asleep, but was off on his feet the next instant. He trotted over to the entrance, directly next to the dirt place, which smelled rancid and horrible. And then, without even so much as a glance over his shoulder, pushed his way through the fronds and brambles and into the real world.

He was blinded for a heartbeat from all the greenery, bit blinked it away. He shut his jaw as soon as he realized it was opened and puffed out his fur. It was chilly this morning. He planned on catching a squirrel to make up for the one Klaus caught. He didn't trust that cat, no matter who he was. There was just something off about him, though he couldn't quite put his claw on it. He opened his mouth to try and track the rodent, but then he realized he didn't know what a squirrel smelled like. Then, suddenly he smelled something. It didn't exactly smell like squirrel, but it has an animal likeness to it. He takes the smell to an opening in a very small tree. He got a look at the animal and it didn't look like a squirrel. It was smaller and brown and didn't have a long tail like the one from yesterday, but it looked edible. He tried to remember what Willow had been saying on the catching part. He remembered only something about crouching and making certain that you stay undetected by your prey. It seemed easy enough, but the animal seemed way larger than him. How was he ever going to kill it?

He got the thought out of his mind and got as close to the ground as he could. Then, he leaped. But in midair he was knocked to the ground by heavy paws. He turned his head to the side and watched the animal scurry off to hide. Angered, Soot tried to push his opponent off with his hind paws. He was super heavy and really strong. Soot thought he smelled like tom, but there was a familiar scent to the cat, like a warmness but fierce confidence. The black kitten went limp under his attackers weight and got him to retreat.

But Soot lunged up at the opportunity and got back on his paws. The other cat simply sat back watching him with amusement. That was when he realized that the cat was in fact a she-cat, and not a tom. He was surprised that she was as strong as she was, but didn't take much time to ponder the thought. Instead he unsheathed his tiny sharp claws and dove onto her. But she didn't fight back. She barely even moved, yet she was blocking his attack completely. She had her paw rested on Soot's chest and was pushing him back. He tried to claw her leg away, but to prevail. He finally gave up and sat back on his haunches, exhausted.

He looked up at the she-cat and turned his head up in order to look her in the eyes. Now that he was really looking, he noticed how beautiful she was. Her long gray and white fur looked soft and smooth and her even fluffier tail swayed in the wind. And her eyes, her eyes were a gorgeous shade of green that reminded him of the leaves that grew from the shrubs around his den. She was just pretty. All this time she hasn't spoken, until now. And her voice was just as pretty as the rest of her.

"Hello young one. My name is Berryheart. You are trespassing on Moonclan territory." She puffed out her fur trying to look scarier. Soot stared up at her with wide yellow eyes. He tried speaking but his voice caught in his throat. "I-I'm sorry. I didn't know... I should be getting home though, my family will be shaking from their dens by now. Bye," he started to walk off, only to be pulled back by the scruff. She had taken hold of him and latched her teeth around his skin. She easily picked him up and trotted over to the forest that started right at the edge of a little meadow filled with wildflowers. He squirmed in her grasp and tried to wail out, but no sound escaped. Thoughts passed in this mind about what she was to do with him. What if she eats me? What if she takes me away and never let's me go back home? I never should've left my nest this morning...

His eyelids started to feel heavy and his body grew tired. The sun was just starting to set behind the mountains. He tried to fight the feeling of tiredness, but soon let the darkness claim him as he slipped into sleep.

Chapter Three

[image]

Soot woke up to a water droplet splashing on his nose. He didn't realize he wasn't in his nest until a heartbeat later. And he jumped up, all remnants of sleep long gone. He was surrounded by four cats: Berryheart, a white tom, a white and ginger she-cat and a massive gray tabby tom. The white tom stuck his muzzle in Soot's face and sniffed him. The tiny kitten shrunk back, but the tom insisted. The gray cat prodded the white one with a forepaw, "Come on Greeneyes, leave him be. He has traveled a long way."

He then turned to the unknown she-cat and whispered, barely audible to the newcomer. "Splashfoot, why don't you go reassure the clan. Don't give away too much." Splashfoot nodded curtly and slid out of the opening between two rocks that was just big enough for the large tom standing in front of him. The tom, clearly the one in charge flicked his tail towards the exit and both Berryheart and Greeneyes left the small den. That gave Soot just enough room to get comfortable. He still remained on edge, but they haven't hurt him yet, right? His fur was standing up, and the tom could sense his fear. He placed his tail tip on his shoulder, which soothed the feeling. "Don't worry kit, you are safe here. Why don't you tell me your name. Do you know where you came from? Any family?"

Soot made no move to answer, and the tom gave in to the silence. He moved towards the entrance and before slipping outside murmured, "Welcome to Moonclan. I am Clawstar." Soot wrinkled his nose in confusion. Moonclan? And what funny names... Though he couldn't say much on the matter because he didn't know of any other names.

When Soot awoke from his nap an animal lay in front of him. It was small, and brown. Then he realized, it's the thing I was trying to hunt earlier! Or yesterday, he didn't really know how long he was asleep. He tucked into it, curling his lips at the rancid taste, but as he got used to it, he was fine with the taste. It was awfully musky

for a squirrel, or whatever it was, bit it was quite good. It was only when he finished the whole thing when he noticed the shadow at the edge of the den. He fluffed out his fur and hissed at the stranger, only to see it was Berryheart. He immediately flattened his fur and turned back to the carcass laying on the den floor. The gray and white she-cat padded over to him.

"It's called a mouse. Have you never had one before?"

Mouse? What a funny word. "No." He didn't say anything more, though the she-cat continued to talk, Soot learned to drown her out. She left after a while, with her tail drooping behind her. Soot felt bad about hurting her feelings and strolled out of his den to say sorry, bit was hit with so many smells he couldn't find where she was off to. He tried looking for her pelt among the many other, but had no luck in doing so. It was then that he realized he was being stared at. There were so many pairs of eyes, and all of them on him. Here, in this new place, he was an outcast. He shrunk back against the rock of the den he was just in, but had trouble finding the entrance. A she-cat and a tom walked up to him, with distrusting looks in their eyes. The black and white tabby tom prodded Soot's shoulder with a paw and the white she-cat scolded him, "Zebrahstripe! Don't be rude!" The tom, in turn, scuffed her ear playfully. "Yes Snowpelt." The she-cat Nuzzled her muzzle against Soot's, though she still looked as though she would've done the same if she had the chance.

By now, the other cats had, for the most part, stopped staring, though he still got a couple side glances from everycat. He padded slowly back to his den, to see Greeneyes sorting leaves into separate piles and putting the finished ones into crevices in the walls. They took no notice of each other and Soot waited to hear the slow breaths of the leaf sorting cat that signaled sleep before he would close his eyes.

Chapter Four

[image]

Soot opened his eyes to a starry field with red, orange, and yellow flowers dotting the green grass. In the middle of the meadow sat a sleek black cat. Confused, Soot padded over to her. She had her back turned to him, but now they were facing each other. Shock came over him and he gasped. "Mama! I-I mean Sarah." The she-cat pressed her muzzle against her son's and gave a chuckle.

"Oh my dear kit. I am so sorry I had to leave you, but I am in a good place now."

Soot begin to cry. He never knew his mother, she died while kitting, and in the few days of his life, he had never thought about her. But now, in this starry filled place of the dead, he longed to feel her warmth again. He took another look at his mother. Her black fur, the exact same as his own, was speckled with sparkly stars, even her eyes shone with life. She began walking, heading towards a small creek, where Soot could see large gray fish swimming swiftly. His mother struck her paw in, and, with her claws struck a fish and brought it up out of the water. She then used a killing bite to the spine and started snacking. She looked up momentarily, but Soot waited patiently for her to finish. He didn't think he could eat a star covered fish. Is this food only edible for the cats that have passed on? Soot really didn't know, but it wasn't his concern. At least his mother was safe.

On the other side of the water, a white cat lay bathing in the bright sun. She rose to her paws and swam across to join the two black cats and a sweet smell wafted with her. Her eyes were a beautiful light blue, and, like his mother, was covered in stars. She smiled at him.

"How is your visit to Starclan Soot?"

Soot was surprised. How did she know my name? Instead of voicing this thought, he answered her questions directly. "This place is truly

amazing." Then, being a kit, asked the obvious question.

"Are you dead too?" He blinked up at the pretty she-cat, not knowing if she would answer or not.

She sighed softly, and settled down on the bank. "I am. I died fighting for my clan, like a true warrior." Her chest swelled with pride. Soot didn't understand. How can you be proud about being dead?

Soot had become acquainted with Whitefur, the Starclan cat he had met and had gotten to know his mother. She said it was time to wake up, but he didn't know he was dreaming. As darkness began to wash over him, she whispered in his ear only a sentence. Bit that sentence made his blood run cold.

'You will have to wade through blood to win this war.'

Chapter Five

[image]

A light brown tabby tom, Greeneyes, and Clawstar were whispering softly along each other in the corner of the den. Sarah's words rang in his ears 'You will have to wade through blood to win this war.' But what does that mean? There wasn't a war going on. Was there? Soot couldn't hear what the three were talking about, but he thought about how Starclan could visit anybody. So he spoke up.

"Did you hear it too?" Three pairs of eyes turned to him. Clawstar faced the tabby, "Oatwhisker, go tell Splashfoot to send out a hunting patrol, will you?" Oatwhisker didn't reply, but got up to leave. Greeneyes narrowed his eyes at the black kitten, a cat whom no one knew the name of.

"Heard what?"

Clawstar folded his paws under him and waited for an answer.

"The starry cat. She said 'You will have to wade through blood to win this war.' Did my ma visit you too?"

Clawstar furrowed his eyebrows. "Tell me, what is your name?"

"My name is Soot. My mother visited me in a dream and said that to me. You heard it too didn't you?"

At that moment, Oatwhisker trotted back into the den and settled down next between Clawstar and Greeneyes. Clawstar murmured something in his ear and he nodded towards the young kit. It was as if all three of them were eyeing him down. He felt small under their gazes, bit refused to let them see it. He puffed out his chest, and stood eye to eye with them. Finally, Oatwhisker pressed his muzzle to his shoulder, signaling respect. Soot was proud of himself for standing up to them, but didn't want to stay and chat. He walked out of the den and over to the pile of fresh prey. He dragged out a squirrel and pulled it behind him to a jutting rock near a wall of

vines.

A black tom, not as big as the leader, but bigger than him padded over and asked to share his meal. He gladly accepted, mostly because he couldn't finish it himself and didn't want to waste anything.

"My name is Nightpaw. What's yours?" The young cat inquired, biting into a piece of meat.

Soot swallowed the bite in his mouth before answering. "Soot."

"Sootkit?"

"No. Just Soot. My father named me that because of my pelt."

"Mine too."

The two toms finished the squirrel, and began grooming themselves. Soot stepped over to the clan leader and asked to talk to him. Clawstar obliged and led him into his den, a large hole in the ground, carved from water. He sat opposite of the leader.

Soot started the conversation. "I think I want to go home. Can you have Berryheart take me back?"

"You think?" Clawstar pondered.

Soot sighed. "No. I know. My family will be worried about me. I am grateful for your hospitality, but I must be getting home. Please let me go," He pleaded.

Clawstar smiled a bit. "You are not a prisoner here Soot. We cannot allow you to leave, but I can send a patrol to retrieve your kin from the woods."

Before Soot could protest, Clawstar was out of earshot. Angered, Soot stormed out of the den and stomped back to the den he was staying in. There was another cat in his bed, a spotted cat whose name was Cheetahclaw. Greeneyes was feeding her some gross smelling herbs. Apparently Cheetahclaw thought the same thing. With no more nests for him, Oatwhisker led the tiny black cat to the

nursery, where Applefur and her two kits were sleeping. There was an empty nest in there, I'm which he gladly fell asleep. He had no dreams that night, only darkness.

He felt as though there was someone watching him, and tried opening his eyes in his head, but was only greeted by black. Cold and dark blackness. Like the whole of Starclan had just burnt out. Just nothingness.

Chapter Six

[image]

When Soot woke up, the den he was sleeping in was deserted. He let out a sigh of relief, his breath billowing out a cloud. He shivered, disturbed by the coldness of the air. His tongue swiped over his fur, rubbing it the wrong way. It made him feel warmer. He stood and stretched, his limbs already feeling awake, though his mind was fuzzy. It felt as though he was trying to remember something, though he couldn't quite put his tail on it. His thoughts were disturbed by Berryheart walking through the den opening. Her whiskers were twitching in annoyance.

"Are you ready to leave, *Soot?"*

Soot was surprised by the coldness in her voice, but he didn't reply. Merely nodded his head and followed her out of the den and into the camp clearing. A thin layer of frost covered the grass. Very few cats were laying in the clearing, for most of them were staying warm in their nests. Soot couldn't blame them either, if he had the choice, he would still be curled up in his, probably sleeping away the day.

His stomach growled, though he couldn't bring himself to complain because he wanted to get going as soon as possible. His fur was fluffed up against the cold. Yesterday the air was warm and the grass green, today all life seemed to have withered without a trace. It was like claws of destruction had gripped the forest while every cat slept. But none of the clan cats seemed to notice. They acted as if it was normal for this sort of thing to happen. The wind brought an eery feeling with it, which brought goose bumps to Soot's skin. He felt like someone was looking at him and he turned his head. Nothing.

Am I going crazy? Soot thought. Berryheart was waiting by the camp entrance, clearly becoming impatient. Soot put an extra skip in his step to will himself to go faster. He didn't want Berryheart to get more upset than she already was. The closer Soot got, he

realized that Berryheart wasn't alone. There was a white she-cat sitting next to her. She stared at Soot with a smile on her face.

"Hello Soot. My name is Snowpaw. I will be accompanying you back to your home." She said in a sophisticated voice. She looked pretty, with pitch black paws that looked soft and smooth, and bright yellow eyes that reflected the sunlight that shone weakly in the forest. She was bigger than Soot, but considerably smaller than Berryheart. They must have some relation, but Soot couldn't figure out what it was. They could be related, but Berryheart didn't seem like the kind of she-cat who would have kits. Snowpaw answered his question before Soot could ask it. Almost as if she took the words out of his mouth.

"I'm Berryheart's apprentice. I'm training to become a warrior!" She sounded proud of herself. And she was right to be. It seemed pretty impressive to be a warrior. Or at least that's the impression that he got.

Snowpaw trailed behind Soot, with Berryheart in the lead. Soot didn't know where they were, he was passed out the whole way to the Moonclan camp. He didn't know how anyone found their way around this place. All of the trees looked identical, and in every aspect: the looks, the smell, probably every thing else too. But his companions seemed to have no trouble finding their way. He didn't know how they did it.

All of a sudden, Berryheart and Snowpaw stopped in their tracks, causing him to bump in to the gray and white warrior. Her ears were pricked, and her jaws slightly open. Like she was searching for something, or someone.

Then, a yowl cut through the silence of the forest. With the scream came a swarm of cats. Pelts of all different colors swam through the trees. They were all heading through the forest to one place. The camp!

Chapter Seven

[image]

Soot's pelt pricked with anticipation as cats unknown to him raced past him and his comrades. Without waiting for Snowpaw or Berryheart, he sped after the strangers. He had to get back to camp before they did. They were invaders. *Maybe they are trying to kill all of MoonClan!* He tried to nudge the thoughts from his conscious, but it wasn't working very well. His heart thumped in his chest and he heard pawsteps sound from behind him. He turned his head and saw Snowpaw directly behind him with Berryheart just after her. He quickened his pace, taking another route he remembered from earlier to try and get ahead of the newcomers, but his tiny legs could only get him so far. Snowpaw was catching up to him, and she took the lead. He was grateful for it because he was starting to get lost and she must've known the fastest way back to camp. Berryheart stayed behind, making sure they maintained undetected.

His paws started to ache, but he forced himself to carry on. He could still hear paw steps from the invaders, but they were trailing behind now. The shrubby entrance to camp was coming into his line of sight and he plunged into the clearing. Snowpaw and Berryheart came behind his tail. He brought up his courage and yelled as loud as he could.

"Attack! The camp is being attacked!"

Warriors began to pour from their nests, and just in time too. Outsiders began to stream into camp, claws unsheathed and gfrowls rising from their throats. MoonClan matched them claw for claw, in a battle line. The invaders stood shoulder to shoulder, with a gray cat in the lead. He looked familiar, then it hit him; it was Klaus! His father had come for him! Clawstar approached him with his head held high.

"What is the meaning of this?!"

Klaus growled at him, but his claws remained sheathed. "I am

here to take back what is mine: my son."

Soot was right. His chest swelled with pride. His father did love him! But why did it take so long for him to find him? He dismissed the thought as his father continued.

"If you won't give him to me, I'll just have to take him by force!" He then proceeded to lunge at the MoonClan leader. His claws raked his shoulders, which was the signal for his comrades to begin the raid. MoonClan played defense in the fight, trying to drive them back into the forest. Soot decided to join the fight and took on a tortoiseshell who was much larger than himself. Her claws sliced his hind leg, and she landed a paw on his shoulder. He tried to match her blow for blow, but he never had any training.

"Go back to the nursery where you belong! You puny kit!" The cat scowled at him.

Soot growled and raked his claws against her flank. Blood swelled from the wound, but she took no notice. She merely shook off the pain and tried bowling Soot off his paws. He tried to keep his balance, but it was proving difficult. His whole body ached and his wounds trobbed with pain.

Then someone joined him against the she-cat. It was Snowpaw! She dodged the Tortoiseshell's blows, while managing to get some damage done. The intruder finally backed off, by not before shoving Soot and making him slide in the dirt. He coughed up some of the mud that got in his mouth, and stood up shaking. His body was hurt.

Snowpaw padded over to him and began licking his wounds, but he shoved her off. The battle wasn't over yet! Only a few stragglers remained from the offensive side, and they were diminishing quickly. He spotted his father still hassling with Clawstar and ran over to help. He faced Klaus and dug his teeth into his ears and he yelped in pain. He quickly retreated and sat down on his haunches. His breathing was heavy and his wounds bled steadily, but still he looked happy.

He pressed his muzzle lovingly against his son's. "Soot! I'm so

glad I found you! Come on, let's leave,"

Soot pulled away. "You didn't have to start a fight! You could've just asked for me!" There was a sad look in his eyes, but it disappeared in a flash, only to be replaced by anger.

"I had to get you back! They took you from me!"

Soot shook his head. "I was on my way back to you. They were taking me home!" Soot felt tears form in his eyes, but he pushed them away and forced himself to be strong. His father growled at him and cuffed him over the ear.

"How 'bout we put this all behind us and go home?" His voice was softer now.

Soot took a deep breath and puffed out his chest. "No," he stated. "This is my home now."

Chapter Eight

[image]

Klaus stepped back, startled. "Wait, what?"

Two cats stepped out from behind him: a black and white tom and a gray tabby she-cat. His litter mates were here! They scurried out of their hiding places and over to Soot. They sat at his sides, backing him up. Willow piped up.

"Yeah daddy! It's really nice here. I wanna stay with Soot." Flash nodded and agreed with his litter mates. Klaus had a mix of emotions showing in his eyes, but Soot could only make out pain. His father took a moment to look around at the damage he had caused, then turned tail and ran out of camp. The cats that had stayed until the end got up and followed him. Two warriors followed them out and made sure they didn't return.

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It had been two sunrises since the battle, and Soot and his litter mates had joined MoonClan formally. They even got official clan names. They were now Sootkit, Flashkit, and Willowkit. He thought the names suied them, and he had learned the names of all the clan cats. Soot and his brother and sister shared a nest with Applefur and her kits Mousekit and Pebblekit. Soot was also pretty sure he had heard every tale the elders could ever tell. A full moon was tonight, and evru cat was talking about a gathering. *Whatever that is. I'll have to have Snowpaw what it is*, he promised himself.

He caught up to Snowpaw at the freshkill pile just as the sun was setting. She had been out training all day, and just got back to camp with Berryheart. He padded over to her and sat down next to her. She began to chow down on a large vole, wolfing it down hungrily.

"Hey Snowpaw, do you know anything about the gathering tonight?"

Snowpaw nodded and licked her paw aggressively. "Oh yeah. All of the clans gather at the great rock to share news under a truce. But you have to be an apprentice to go. Sorry Sootkit."

Sootkit nodded solemnly, and perked his ears up the next second. "Will you be going?" Snowpaw nodded, and a smile formed at the corner of her mouth. She had stood from her now finished meal, and pounced on top of Sootkit's tail, he whipped it away from her and turned to face her.

The game was on now, and he was ready to play. He tucked his paws beneath himself and launched from the ground and onto Snowpaw's back. She reared up and tried to shake him off, but Sootkit held tight to her thick fur. Then, with no warning, she flipped over on her back, squishing Sootkit under her weight. He squirmed out from under her, and curred her ear with his paw. He wasn't as big as Snowpaw yet, but he was growing fast. In a matter of moons he would be an apprentice. Then, he could train with the other apprentices as well.

Clawstar emerged from his den, along with Splashfoot, Greeneyes and Oatwhisker. They were whispering amongst themselves. Then Clawstar leaped onto the tall rock and said, "All cats old enough to yowl gather beneath the Tall Rock,"

When the whole clan had gathered, he spoke again.

"I have decided who will be attending the gathering tonight." His tail sweeped over the smooth rock and he motioned toward his deputy who stood at the bottom of the rock. Splashfoot took over from there and started calling out names.

"Snowpelt, Nightpaw, Rainclaw, Zebrahstripe, Tigerlily," he paused to take a breath and then started talking again.

"Steampaw, Berryheart, Snowpaw, Pepperclaw, Darkear, Patchpelt. We will be leaving as soon as the moon starts to rise."

The chosen cats assembled near the camp entrance, waiting for the signal to leave. The others went straight to their dens. Snowpaw and Nightpaw were tumbling with each other and Steampaw was

padding back and forth near his mentor. He seemed anxious, or nervous. Or a mix of the two.

The moon was just visible above the treetops when the group set out, Snowpaw among them. After she left, Sootkit went back to the nursery. Applefur and the other kits were all fast asleep in their nests. He joined his brother and sister in their own nest and cuddled up next to them. Sleep gripped onto his consciousness and he was pulled into a dream.

Chapter Nine

[image]

Snowpaw had gotten back to camp late at night, but Sootkit was there to welcome her. She seemed a little upset, but she wouldn't talk about it. She just stormed off to her den along with the other apprentices. All of the cats who attended looked as if someone rubbed their fur the wrong way. But no cat was willing to say why.

Sootkit stayed in his nest all through the morning. Only when the sun was at the highest point in the sky, did he stray out of the nursery. He avoided Snowpaw who was sunning herself by the fallen log. She was in a happier mood than yesterday, but Sootkit didn't want to take any chances. Steampaw and Nightpaw were out hunting with their mentors, and Clawstar was sharing tongues with his mate Applefur. Mousekit and Pebblekit were pouncing around their paws and chasing their taikitten. Copperpelt and Nutwhisker were sleeping at the entrance to their den, snoring loudly. Sootkit trotted over to them, tail drooping. Copperpelt pricked her ears up at the sound of paw steps and looked tiredly up at the young kitten.

"Hello young one, what's on your mind?" The ginger she-cat licked one of her paws and cleaned her ears in one swift motion.

Sootkit sighed. "Is there something wrong with Snowpaw? Ever since the gathering she has been acting odd."

"The gathering was just a bit tense is all. She'll be her old self in no time."

Her companion, Nutwhisker nodded. "Looks like love is blooming earlier and earlier each year," Sootkit was shocked. "Wh-What! I am *not* in love. Snowpaw would never love a loner!"

Nutwhisker shared a look with Copperpelt, and they nodded off laying next to each other. Sootkit was fuming. *He was not in love with Snowpaw!* And he was going to prove it. From now on, he would stay away from Snowpaw for as long as he was alive.

The camp suddenly became very stuffy and hot. He became light headed and dizzy. His head was spinning and the ground was shaking. Black dots swirled around his eyes, until finally blocking his vision from the world.

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He opened his eyes to the field that was oh so familiar. But he was not alone. Greeneyes was talking to someone, a tortoiseshell. Sootkit was hidden behind a tree stump, so he was undetected, but he could tell by the way Greeneyes looked that he knew Sootkit was there. He shrunk back against the nearest tree, trying to mask his scent somehow, but he didn't think it was helping. At least the other cat didn't seem to notice him. Sootkit tried to get closer to hear what they were saying, but it proved useless.

The tortoiseshell was gone now and Greeneyes was walking towards Sootkit. The medicine cat took one look at the kit and whispered, "You must wake up now. Speak of this to no cat. Do you understand?"

Sootkit nodded and felt this world slipping away. Then in the blink of an eye, it faded to black and was replaced by the real world.

¶¶

"Sootkit? Sootkit! Sootkit wake up!" Snowpaw was standing over him. He opened his eyes to see Greeneyes in the corner of the medicine den sorting herbs. At the mention of the kit's name, he turned his head and stared into Sootkit's eyes.

"Good, you're awake. Now we can find out what happened." He looked at Snowpaw which was her cue to leave. But they were still not alone. Flashkit and Willowkit were prodding his side with a paw. "Are you alright? What happened?"

Oatwhisker herded them out of the medicine den, following them on the way out. Then it was just Sootkit and Greeneyes. Greeneyes did not look happy.

"What were you doing in StarClan?" His tail flicked with annoyance.

Sootkit looked back at him, defiance coursing through his veins,

controlling his every action. He narrowed his eyes. *Two can play at this game,* he thought.

"Who was that cat you were talking to?"

Greeneyes ignored the question and growled at the kit. "Now is not the time for games! How did you enter that field?"

Sootkit cocked his head to the right. "How did you?"

Finally deciding that the kit wasn't going to give anything away, he left, but not before passing Sootkit a bundle of leaves that smelled sweet and sticky. He took the whole thing in his mouth and regretted it instantly. It didn't taste as good as it smelled.

Sootkit was back in the nursery that night, but Oatwhisker was in there to keep watch on him I'm case he were to have another *fit.*

Chapter Ten

[image]

Snowpaw had visited Sootkit a couple of times after his 'incident.' But she was slowing down the time between visits. Sootkit had become confined to the nursery and was only allowed out with a escort and only for a short amount of time. He hated having to be stuck in a stuffy den while the other kits got to go out and have fun. It wasn't fair. And he knew that Greeneyes was the one who said it was good for him to stay alone. Sootkit thought that was his idea of keep in him quiet. But it wasn't going to work. He would find a way out of this problem one way or another. But for now, he would have to follow the rules.

''

Two moons had passed since Greeneyes dropped the quarantine on Sootkit. He and his litter mates were now five moons old, nearly six. Willowkit had gotten acquainted quite nicely with Pebblepaw. Him and his sister had become apprentices a few sunrises ago, and it seemed as though every she-cat available was throwing themselves over Pebblepaw, including Sootkit's only sister. Personally, he thought that Pebblepaw was a bit of a stick up. His sister Mousepaw was much nicer to every cat. She was caring and nice to every cat she met, and saw the good side to everyone, including her brother.

But recently the two of them had become very quiet. And Sootkit couldn't blame them. After their mother died of greencough, the whole clan was mourning. Sootkit, Flashkit and Willowkit weren't alone in the nursery though, Featherfoot had moved to the nursery expecting Darkear's kits. The gray she-cat wasnt very keen on looking after some cats kits, but she managed to keep the new clan cats out of trouble.

They weren't the only cats to have changed either, Flashkit was acting strange. He seemed to be missing quite a bit too, every couple of sunrises, he would sneak out of his nest and out of camp.

Every cat knew that kits weren't allowed out of camp. And when Sootkit confronted Flashkit about it, he got really nervous and avoided the question. Something was really off about him, and Sootkit was determined to find out what it was.

Sootkit hadn't seen Greeneyes in any more dreams, but Oatwhisker knew about Sootkit's visits to the stars. The medicine cat apprentice was certain that StarClan was trying to say he should be a medicine cat, but the black kitten disagreed. He was going to be a warrior!

Chapter Eleven

[image]

Flashkit was sneaking out again. Sootkit watched from his nest as his brother tiptoed out of the nursery. As soon as he was out of earshot, Sootkit rustled out of the nursery to find out what the black and white kit was up to. Flashkit was squeezing through the dirtplace entrance. *That's how he was getting out of camp!* He dodged Mistytail, the guard, and scurried after Flashkit. He had to rely solely on his sense of smell, because it was hard to see in the dark. Sootkit tried to stay downwind, a trick Steampaw had taught him. He tracked his brother all the way to the sycamore sap. Flashkit was sitting there with his tail wrapped around his paws as if he was waiting for some cat. In a heartbeat, he was joined by a light brown she-cat who rubed her muzzle against her brother's. Along with the she-cat came a horrible stench that smelled of dirt and water. There was only one clan that lived underground: NightClan. They could see extremely well in the dark and spent most of their lives surrounded by rocks.

Flashkit had been seeing some cat from another clan! Sootkit stretched his neck to hear what they were saying. The only thing he caught was the she-cat's name. *Birchpaw.* If Birchpaw and Flashkit were to become mates, it would ruin his brother among the clans! It was against the warrior code! Sootkit stepped forward to get another look, but made the mistake of stepping on a fallen branch. It cracked beneath his paw, alerting his brother and Birchpaw of their company. Birchpaw scurried off in the direction of her territory and Flashkit skipped merrily back to camp without seeing Sootkit.

Sootkit stayed still for a moment longer before deciding to step out. The moment he did so, Birchpaw sprang from behind a bush and landed on top of Sootkit wit an '*oof.*' Sootkit squirmed beneath her weight, and finally managed to get out from under her. He faced his opponent, tail swishing back and forth, claws unsheathed, and eyes wide open. Birchpaw mirrored his moves.

"You are MoonClan aren't you?" She asked at last. Sootkit stayed silent while maintaining his position.

The apprentice pleaded with him. "Please! You can't tell any cat! Flashkit would never be able to become a warrior if any cat knew!" A flash of emotion crossed over her face, but it diminished just as quickly as it had come. Sootkit thought about this for a moment and then looked back up at Birchpaw. He didn't know how they had met, or why, but they seemed happy together. *Right? I'm sure StarClan wouldn't stop love. Would they?* Sootkit tool his unsheathed claws and swiped her over the ear playfully.

"I'll keep quiet for my brother. But if you try anything..."

Birchpaw nodded her head quickly and gave her thanks before hopping away. The sun was coming up now, signaling dawn. The Dawn Patrol would be waking up soon. *I should be back to camp.* Sootkit hurried home, and and entered as he had left. Flashkit and Willowkit were in their nests, but Flashkit wasn't asleep. Instead of trying to provoke him, Sootkit tried to play nice.

"Where were you? You were gone when I woke up and I was looking everywhere for you!"

Flashkit lied easily. "I was in dirtplace." *Is it really that easy for him to lie to family? What if he has lied about other things too?*

Sootkit shook the thought from his mind and left the nursery. He couldn't look at his brother any longer. Sootkit stepped over to the fallen log and layed next to it to watch the assembled warriors leave to patrol the territory. The group consisted of Cheetahclaw, Patchpelt, Tigerlily, Berryheart, and Snowpaw. They left in a hurry. Sootkit then dozed off, with Willowkit soon joining him in the sun.

Chapter Twelve

[image]

Today, Sootkit and his litter mates are six moons old. Clawstar would be making them apprentices any day now. Flashkit was ignoring Sootkit, and Willowkit was still looking at Pebblepaw. Sootkit wondered who his mentor would be. *Maybe Mistytail? Or Splashfoot? Or maybe even Clawstar!* They would be great mentors. Sootkit was awakened from his daydream by Clawstar calling a clan meeting. *This is finally it!*

He hopped up from the fallen log, startling Willowkit. Once she realized what was going on, she too got to her paws. Flashkit and Willowkit sat slightly in front of Sootkit, with Mistytail, Cheetahclaw, Tigerlily, Darkear, and Birchfeather surrounding them. *Maybe one of these cats will be my mentor!*

Sootkit didn't dislike the idea of having Birchfeather, the closest warrior, as a mentor. It was just that he had the same name as Birchpaw, Flashkit's secret love. He was still sneaking out to see her in the middle of the night.

Clawstar started the ceremony.

"Kits, you have reached the age of six moons and it is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day on, until you receive your warrior names, you will be known as Sootpaw, Flashpaw and Willowpaw. Willowpaw, your mentor will be Tigerlily. Flashpaw, your mentor will be Birchfeather. And Sootpaw, your mentor shall be Rainclaw. I hope they will teach you all everything they know."

Rainclaw? That old grump? The only thing that old furball does is complain! Sootpaw was outraged! But still he touched noses with his mentor when his litter mates did the same. Flashpaw and his brown colored mentor went straight out of the camp. Willowpaw and Tigerlily asked if Sootpaw and Rainclaw wanted to battle practice with them, but Rainclaw declined. He then turned to Sootpaw and said in all seriousness,

"How about you clear out the elders nests? I think they've got fleas."

Sootpaw was fuming. "What? My first apprentice task is cleaning out the *elders* den? That is so not fair!"

Rainclaw closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "Patience my child. I will teach you how to hunt tomorrow. If you finish your duties today, I may even give you a tour of theterritory.= = = = = = = = = = = = = =

Copperpelt and Nutwhisker thanked the new apprentice as he was leaving. Copperpelt had the most fleas, he could still taste them in his mouth. Looking up, he saw there was still some light there. *Great! I get to see the territory!* He padded over to where Rainclaw was sun bathing and nudged him hard with a paw. "Come on Rainclaw. You said you would show me the territory!"

The tom signed and got to his paws grumbling. "Alright alright! We'll start from camp and go to the sycamore sap, then the training log and finally circle around the ravine and back to camp. That sound alright to you?"

Sootpaw nodded eagerly and pelted past the biahy entrance and into the forest. He knew where the sycamore sap was, and making sure his mentor was close on his tail, sped off in that direction. He made it there a heartbeat before Rainclaw. His mentor was panting hard.

"You knew where to go. Have you been here before?"

Sootpaw thought back to *that* night. Then shook his head. Rainclaw narrowed his eyes, but said nothing more. Sootpaw followed his mentor to the training log, where Willowpaw and Tigerlily were batting at each other. They payed no attention to Sootpaw. Sootpaw could hear the rushing water of the ravine and raced towards the sound, he got closer and closer. Then Rainclaw yowled out for him.

"Sootpaw! Stop or youll run into-" he didn't get to finish his sentence because Sootpaw ran straight into the river. Rainclaw

dived I'm behind him and pulled him out by the scruff.

"Don't you know MoonClan cats don't swim?" Sootpaw thought about how Rainclaw could swim, bit then focused on how cold he was. He groomed his fr before heading back to camp. Half way there he turned to his mentor.

"If MoonClan cats can't swim how can you?"

Rainclaw sighed. He seemed to be doing a lot of that lately. "Don't you know why Clawstar asked me to be your mentor? I was like you once."

Sootpaw nodded. "You mean a loner,"

Rainclaw nodded once and continued his trek back home. The sun had long since set when they made it back to camp. Falling into the river was a delay in their trip. Sootpaw headed for the apprentices den, and upon entering saw one empty nest. Right next to Snowpaw.

Chapter Thirteen

[image]

He had another dream that night.

He opened his eyes to a forest, instead of the familiar field. It seemed as though he were all alone, but looking to his sides, he saw multiple cats, nearly enough for a whole clan. But the only ones he recognized were his clan medicine cats and leader. The cats were assembled in a battle line, as if they were waiting for an attack. No cat dared to move. Then Sootpaw heard pawsteps. Thrumming against the earth, getting louder and louder as they came. Then, cats just pelted through the trees, running as fast as they could. Some were yowling, other stopped and calling out names. One of the few who had stopped Sootpaw recognized as his brother Flashpaw. He was yelling a name.

"Sootfur! Sootfur where are you!"

Sootpaw had no clue why he was using that name. *Was this in the future?*

The other cats had begun huddling together, trying to stay out of the way of the fleeing cats. When all of them had passed and the forest had become quiet again, a starry silver cat stepped in front of him. Addressing all cats who stood before her, she said, "You will have to wade through blood to win this war." Then she disappeared.

Why does StarClan feel so keen on telling *him* this? He wasn't special. He wasn't important. The cats around his began to fade, and he looked down at his own paws to see they were becoming see-through. He looked around and tried to scream for help, but StarClan was gone.

Instead, he was in his nest, still screaming. Snowpaw and Mousepaw were huddled around him, with worried looks on their faces. He leaped out of his nest and scrambled out of the apprentices den. He scurried over to the leaders den and scratched

on the side of the rock. There was no answer. He decided to not wait any longer and plunged into the large hole.

Clawstar, Greeneyes and Oatwhisker were sitting in a semi-circle on the ground farrest from the entrance. They all lofted their heads in his direction and Clawstar's eyes widened.

"Sootpaw, good. You're awake. We were just discussing something that happened while we slept. Do you have anything to say about the subject at paw?"

Sootpaw shook his head so violently that he was sure he heard his brain get knocked off its stand.

He padded over to the three larger cats and completed the circle.

"But I do have to tell you all something," he paused to make sure every cat was listening to him. "That wasn't the first time someone has told me that. Once before, when I was visiting StarClan, a white cat came to me and gave me that very message."

His clanmates looked surprised to hear this. But that didn't stop the black apprentice from continuing.

"I didn't know what to think about it at the time, so I didn't say anything, but I think I know what it means now."

Clawstar lifted his head once more. "Explain."

Sootpaw wrapped his tail around his front paws and took a deep breath.

"Well, the first time I was told this, I really was wading through blood. So maybe the water will turn red and thick and, to get away from something or someone we will need to cross the river."

He ended his lecture with a puff of his chest. *He had really just solved a mystery!*

Clawstar pondered the idea for a moment, then turned to his accomplices and they nodded slowly.

Clawstar stood up rather abruptly and stretched his legs.

"Well then. I will talk to the cats that were with us about it and see what we find."

Sootpaw cocked his head to the side in confusion. Clawstar noticed and answered his unsaid question.

"The cats with us were clan leaders and medicine cats. The only one who wasn't either would be you."

Sootpaw shifted his weight onto his hind paws and staggered out of the den.

Why was StarClan targeting him? Why not some other apprentice like Snowpaw? She was tough. She would be able to handle this.

Chapter Fourteen

[image]

Sootpaw and all the apprentices would be going to the gathering tonight.

Sootpaw had crawled out of his den and headed straight to the freshkill pile. Darkear's was munching on the wing of a sparrow. He lifted his head and nearly yowled so loud Sootpaw rocked on his paws.

"You have to hunt before you get your share." He didn't wait for a response to continue chowing down on his fill. Sootpaw rolled his eyes and high tailed out of camp. He turned around and saw Pebblepaw on his tail. Sootpaw waited for him to catch up and then started strolling in the forest, keeping his senses alert for any sign of prey. Pebblepaw kept up the pace and matched him stride for stride. The made it to the river without any delays. Sootpaw sat down where the water met the earth and unsheathed his paws. He hooked his paw in the water, managing to catch a fat carp and nipped its spine with his teeth for a killing bite. He tossed it in the dirt and tried again, but with no success. Pebblepaw was ranting on about something.

"Woah! How did you learn to do that? MoonClan cats don't catch fish! Only river cats do that!"

A river cat was a cat in a clan where they ate prey from the river. Sootpaw felt his cheeks flush hot. He had forgotten that Rainclaw said not to do that in front of clanmates. He sat on his haunches and tried to play it cool.

"Beginners luck, I guess."

Rainclaw had also taught Sootpaw how to swim. *What was so bad about river cats?*

Pebblepaw joined him by the river and leaned over the water.

Sootpaw pushed him back so his shadow was no longer cast over the fish.

"You'll scare the fish away if they see you. Keep your shadow away from the water." Pebblepaw nodded swiftly and locked his gaze on a pike that was gliding down the current. His tail flicked some leaves in the air, startling the older apprentice causing him to plunge in the cold river. He flailed his paws wildly and dreamed for help. Sootpaw was frantic. *Would he be able to keep both of them afloat?*

Pebblepaw was yelping now, "Sootpaw! Sootpaw help!"

Sootpaw didn't have time to spare. He leaped into the strong current and swam strongly to the other apprentice and grabbed hold of his scruff. He tried speaking through the fur, but wasn't sure the soaked tom could hear him.

"Don't flounder! Stay still."

The apprentice must've gotten the point and went dead weight. That made it slightly harder to keep above the current, but his flailing paws were no longer dragging him under. Sootpaw looked around searching for land and moved his paws towards the bank. He would never make it with Pebblepaw with him. He tightened his grip on his friend and stopped swirling his paws. Instead, he let the current cary the two down the river. Pebblepaw was shivering. They washed up on the sand on the other side of the river.

They were on NightClan territory now! Sootpaw let Pebblepaw out of his reach and shook the water out of his fur. Pebblepaw coughed up some water and frantically began licking his pelt. Looking over at his saviour, he mimicked his actions and the water flew out of his short fur and onto Sootpaw's. He shook his fur out once again and looked around. They had not yet crossed the scent line. NightClan placed their marker farther from the river to make sure the water didn't wash away the scent. Pebblepaw's pelt stopped shaking, but Sootpaw could tell he was still spooked.

"Uh. Thanks for, uh. Thanks for saving me. By the way, where did you learn to swim?"

Sootpaw ignored his question. His fur was pricked in frustration. They were on the wrong side of the river! He could feel his face grow heated and he tried to take deep breaths but he was fuming. How could he have landed on the wrong side?

Pebblepaw narrowed his eyes at his denmate. "Sootpaw? Maybe we should look for some stepping stones of some sort? I'm sure there are some farther down, maybe near warmrocks?"

Sootpaw nodded, momentarily forgetting about his mistake. He took the lead, with Pebblepaw limping behind. With any luck, they wouldn't run into any patrols. Not that they would be snuck up on. NightClan's territory consisted on tons of tree trunks left behind when the twolegs come chop them down every few generations. When that happens, all of NightClan stays underground. Tunnels wind all around their territory, their main home. Most of the cats there have dark pelts to blend in the dark and very sharp eyes, used to seeing in darkness. On land, they would be easy to spot.

Sootpaw started thinking about why the clans were named how they were. He knew that MoonClan was named after the roofless camp that they maintain. NightClan for the underground, RuneClan for the crystals that line the rocks in their underground territory RainClan for the water that drips off their tree leaves continuously, ClawClan for being the clan to win the first battle, SkyClan for being such good climbers, FireClan and DesertClan for living in the heat, TwilightClan and DropClan for the time where they hunt, and Sun and CloudClan for the limis which their trees reach. But what about SoulClan?

He was knocked from his daydream when his paw got caught in a crack and he tripped tail over head into a trunk of an old tree. He crashed into the chopped down tree and bounced back like a spring. He flicked his ears in embarrassment and watched Pebblepaw snicker silently. Sootpaw got to his paws and was in the lead again. Pebblepaw bounded forward at the sight of one stepping stones. He leaped not-so-gracefylly onto the first one, and then to the next one and finally the last one, without getting his fur wet.

Sootpaw landed on the first one, with his paws dangling dangerously over the ledge. His claws scrambled on the side before

finally pulling himself up. He scrambled to his paws and leaped from the next one to next one and on to land.

The sun was high in the sky now, and the two apprentices just made it to the MoonClan border, nearest the gathering rock. They were one of the clans that bordered the neutral territory. Pebblepaw was hobbling towards the gathering place and reached the border just before Sootpaw.

"We can hunt here. Darkear's wouldn't be happy if we returned without prey."

The two toms separated and begun hunting among the bushes. Sootpaw focused his senses on a scrabbling on the tree roots just near the stiff gorge that bordered the gathering rock. One wrong move and he would plunge to his demise. He let his tail lie still and breathed through his nose to minimize the sound. Then he waited. After a few hearybeats he spotted the brown fluffy animal through the fronds. It was a plump mouse! He wriggled his hind quarters and then pounced, landing sqaurely on the rodents back. He nioeode his spine swiftly and picked it up by the tail. He carried it over to a large beech tree near a small trickle of water ran through the land. He dug a hole between them and buried his catch.

He heard a slight scrabbling above him and looked up. A russe squirrel was scavaging for nuts around the birch tree. He took his place underneath one of the holly bushes, careful not to prick himself on the sharp leaves. He stared at the prey and water for it to climb down. When it finally did, he leaped from his hiding spot and landed with his paws on the animal's tail. It freaked and sped off in the direction of Pebblepaw and Sootpaw raced after it. Pebblepaw turned around just in time to get trampled by the animal. He thrashed blindly at the animal, but he couldn't pin it to the ground. The squirrel tore up a tree and into a small hole in the trunk. It was gone for good now.

Pebblepaw looked apologeticly at the younger tom and sat up with a plump thrush clamped firmly in his jaws. Sootpaw had retreaeved his mouse and fish and they were dangling from his jaw. Sootpaw could smell the slimy fish under his nose and his ears twitched. He had never had fish before. I wonder what it tastes

like?

The two apprentices made it back to camp soon after. Sootpaw got strange looks from his clanmates as he padded into camp with a carp, but he proudly placed it on top of the freshkill pile. He decided to munch on a small vole, just to quench his hunger before the gathering. Splashfoot was outside the leaders den and Clawstar was mounted on top of the high ledge.

Chapter Fifteen

[image]

"All cats old enough to yowl gather here beneath the high ledge for a clan meeting!" The gray tabby hollered from his position on top of the high ledge. Most of the clan was already gathered, but those who weren't quickly emerged from their dens and sat beneath the highrock. Splashfoot took over, as she always did on a full moon.

"The cats who will attend the gathering tonight are: Pebblepaw, Mousepaw, Sootpaw, Snowpaw, Willowpaw, Flashpaw, Steampaw, Nightpaw, Darkear, Birchfeather, Rainclaw, Tigerlily, Zebrahstripe, Oatwhisker, Darkfur, Berryheart, Copperpelt, Nutwhisker, Pepperclaw and Snowpelt. We will leave at dusk."

When dusk arrived, the cats who were attending the gathering were assembled at the entrance to the camp, eagerly awaiting their leader. Greeneyes was going to stay behind with the rest of the clan. When Clawstar took the lead, his deputy and Oatwhisker cats flanked him. Berryheart and Pepperclaw took the back to make certain that no cat got left behind. Sootpaw walked with Steampaw on his right and Pebblepaw to his left Snowpaw was in front of him and Willowpaw and Flashpaw were close behind. Nightpaw, Mousepaw and Birchfeather were walked flank to flank just behind Clawstar and Darkear, Rainclaw, Tigerlily, Zebrahstripe, Darkfur, Copperpelt and Nutwhisker were in a circle around Snowpelt who was chattering about the squirrel she caught this morning.

They were the first ones to make it to the gathering rock, and each cat took their places among the gorge. The warriors were closest to the gathering rock, with elders near the exit, and apprentices huddled under a gigantic ledge in the cliff. A path carved by many generation of paws carved the sides of the gorge, making a way into the bottom. Sootpaw followed the other apprentices to their spot and settled down with his tail wrapped around his paws. He scented a rancid smell coming from where his

territory started, and turned around to see more cats plunging into the gorge. His pelt pricked with the idea of somecat on his territory, but forced himself to flatten it. There was a truce.

A tortoiseshell leaped atop the gathering rock and sat down next to Clawstar. Steampaw gasped.

"Is Clovernose the new leader of DropClan? Did something happen to Ravenstar? Who's the new deputy?" She asked one of the newcomcing apprentices. Sootpaw listened in on their conversation.

The tortoiseshell apprentice giggled. "It's Cloverstar now. Ravenstar lost a life to a dog and now my mother is the leader. The deputy is Fennelclaw." Snowpaw nodded solemnly. Another apprentice strolled over to the two she-cats and interrupted.

"Newtpaw! Come on, Pebblepaw is taking about he swam out of the river after falling in!"

Newtpaw turned to her littermate and hissed. "Not right now Licenpaw! I'm busy."

Lichenpaw turned away and padded after another apprentice towards Pebblepaw. Sootpaw knew he would twist the story in his favor. He wasn't really upset, but it would be nice to get some credit. He followed the apprentices over to Pebblepaw who was ranting about his success.

"—so, then I swam across to the other side and realized I was in NightClan territory. So I swam all the way back. I was against the current!"

Sootpaw cut in. Pebblepaw had a look of horror on his face when he began to speak, but it was only for a moment.

"Yeah. I was there and saw the whole thing! He wasn't even scared!" Pebblepaw gave him a grateful look and went back to telling his story. Sootpaw felt proud to help out a clanmate. The gorge was so full, he was sure every clan was here now. He had now memorized the smells of all the clans and was able to pick out the different clans from the rest. He made his way over to a group

of apprentices and sat down. He sensed some cat watching him and looked around. He was right. Birchpaw was staring him down from next to Flashpaw and a silver apprentice. She blinked once and looked away. Sootpaw's pelt prickled at the sight of the two of them together but there was notinbg he could do about it.

The tortoiseshell spoke up first. "Ravenstar is deceased and I take her place as Cloverstar. I have received my nine lives from StarClan and the new deputy is Fennelclaw."

A thick furred black she-cat took Cloverstar's place in the front.

"RuneClan has two new warriors. Oakpaw and Coldpaw are now Coldheart and Lostfoot." The clans howled out the new warriors names. Sootpaw spotted the two warriors and looked at Lostfoot. Why was his name changed? Then he saw his paw, well, where his paw was. Seeing his confusion, a black tom leaned toward his ear.

"I'm Clawpaw. Lostfoot got his paw stuck in a fox trap, he's so clumsy." A black tom cuffed Clawpaw's ear with his paw. "Sshhh."

Clawpaw looked at his paws. "Yes Nightstorm." The gathering was a blur from there, and he barely noticed when his clan starts to leave. He caught up to them at the border and with a signal from Clawstar, the clan cats went full speed back to camp. Even the elders managed to keep pace. By the time Sootpaw made it through the entrance, they were all panting. Greeneyes rushed over to the elders and herded them to their den and the clan cats panned out to sleep. Rainclaw promised to do some battle practice tomorrow, and Sootpaw was excited. He was the first one to fall asleep.

Chapter Sixteen

[image]

Sootpaw woke before dawn. His litter mates were still snoring soundly in their nests. Only Flashpaw was missing. He probably went to see Birchpaw. He thought Flashpaw had gotten over her. He was really tired looking now, as if he hasn't slept in days, and he probably hasn't. Sootpaw was worried for his brother, but he wouldn't put his voice to his thoughts.

He crept out of the crowded apprentices den and looked up at the sky. A pale blue was chasinbg out the black. Maybe he could join the dawn patrol? He found Splashfoot near the fallen log and skipped over to him.

"Hey Splashfoot! Could I join the dawn patrol today?"

The white and ginger she-cat flicked one of her ears and paused her nap. She smiled up at the young apprentice.

"Of course you can Sootpaw. They will be heading out in a moment. Snowpelt will be leading the patrol and she is taking Pepperclaw and Mistytail. You should let her know you're tagging along."

Sootpaw nodded anxiously and ran over to the warriors den. He poked his head inside and saw Snowpelt grooming her white fur with long smooth strokes of her tongue. She didn't take notice of the black cat.

"Psst. Hey Snowpelt! I'm going to be joining your patrol."

The white warrior nodded once and returned to her grooming. Her mate Cheetahclaw was snoring softly in the nest next to her and didn't stir when Snowpelt left. She gathered her patrol at the entrance and they were off. They started towards the river and saw Rainclaw basking at warmrocks. He was dozed off in the early sunlight. Was he there all night?

The gray tabby twitched in his sleep, and growled at something in his dreams. Sootpaw noticed the graying fur around his already patchy muzzle. He would be retiring to the elders den soon. He imagined his mentor telling tales to Featherfoot's kits. Featherfoot's belly was so swollen it dragged in the dirt, making her white belly fur tainted with dust. Her kits were due any day now. Sootpaw thought of tiny bundles asking him to show them battle moves and looking up at him in admiration. He couldn't wait for a new set of paws.

Before he knew it, the patrol had walked around the whole territory and were back at camp. His legs ached from walking for so long, but he couldn't help but bundle towards the freshkill pile where Pebblepaw was eating a mouse. He settled down next to the light gray tabby and took a bite of the plump mouse. Pebblepaw licked his lips and looked at Sootpaw.

"Hey Sootpaw? I wanted to thank you for what you did at the gathering. I didn't mean to take all the credit, but the other apprentices were looking at me like a piece of fox dung."

Sootpaw nodded slowly and they both finished the mouse in silence. Maybe Pebblepaw wasn't as snobby as he originally thought. Clawstar was up on the high ledge again and called a clan meeting. Turning to Pebblepaw, Sootpaw twisted his face in confusion.

"What's going on? Is there something important happening?"

Pebblepaw shrugged and the two toms turned their attention to the gray tabby.

"I, Clawstar, leader of MoonClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these three apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I comend them to you as warriors in their turn."

Snowpaw, Steampaw and Nightpaw were sitting with their heads held high.

"Snowpaw, Steampaw, Nightpaw, do you promise to uphold the

warrior code and protect your clan above all else?"

All three apprentice's voices rang out am on the silence.

"I do."

The leader continued with a loud bellowing voice.

"Then by the powers of StarClan I give you your warrior names.Snowpaw, StarClan honors your courage and bravery and welcomes you as a full warrior of MoonClan. Your new name is Snowflight. Steampaw, your honored by your enthusiasm and welcomes you as Steamclaw. Nightpaw, StarClan honors you quick thinking and welcoms you into StarClan's paws as Nightwatcher."

The clan broke out into yowls of congratulations. "Snowflight! Steamclaw! Nightwatcher!"

Their father, Zebrahstripe yowled the loudest and you could see the pride in his mew.

Chapter Seventeen

[image]

Rainclaw never did get to take Sootpaw out for battle training. The last time Sootpaw saw his mentor was at warmrocks. He hasn't returned since then. He wasn't at the warrior ceremony, or when the hunting patrol came back. Apparently no cat had seen him since that morning. Sootpaw was starting to get worried. Without a mentor he wouldn't be able to finish his training and would never be a warrior!

Snowflight noticed his look of worry and padded over to him. She and her litter mates would be sitting vigil over the clan tonight, but it was only sunhigh so she could do whatever until then. The rest of the clan had gone back to regular clan life.

"What's on your mind Sootpaw?"

Sootpaw shifted his paws nervously and avoided the new warrior's gaze.

"Have you seen Rainclaw today? He's been missing since dawn. I'm worried about him."

Snowflight purred softly and rubbed her muzzle against his own.

"Come on, I'll help you look for him. Who do you want on the patrol?"

Sootpaw didn't know of she was authorized to make a searching party, bit obliged.

"Cheetahclaw, Snowpelt and Mistytail."

Mistytail was Rainclaw's sister and Snowpelt and Cheetahclaw were the two best trackers in the clan. They would be helpful in finding the tabby tom. Snow flight gathered the cats with the permission of Splashfoot, who would be coming along. Snowflight and Splashfoot

went towards the river, Cheetahclaw went towards the gathering rock and Mistytail and Sootpaw went towards RainClan territory.

The gray she-cat padded beside her brother's apprentice and kept her jaw parted slightly to catch the faintest scent of her kin. Sootpaw knew what it was like to lose family, but he couldn't imagine losing a littermate you grew up with. Sootpaw mirrored her actions and kept his eyes peeled for any sign of fur on brambles or paw prints in the mud. Sootpaw also tried to keep an eye on Mistytail. Rainclaw was her only living kin, without him, she would be all alone. She never took on another mate after Stormwhisker died, and never had any kits. The only kin she would ever have were Featherfoot's kits. Rainclaw was the father.

All of a sudden, Mistytail took off full speed into the trees. Sootpaw followed her and tried to catch up, but she was running as fas as she could. She stopped abruptly, causing Sootpaw to run into her haunches. Them he saw why she had skidded to a halt. In the dirt lay a body. Blood still gushed from Rainclaw's wounds and his body was cold. His green eyes were dull and lifeless. Mistytail yowled in anguish and rushed over to the tom. She pushed her muzzle into his sodden fur. The ground was stained with the sticky red liquid and clouds gathered above. Rain drips began to pour as if StarClan was mourning for the slain warrior. Who would do such a thing?

Cheetahclaw, Snowflight, Snowpelt and Splashfoot arrived soon after the rain started. It seemed as though the tom had been murdered, but no cat said anything about it. A thick red gash opened his throat. The patrol gathered around the tom and mourned him for a moment.

Sootpaw was disturbed. "We need to take him back to camp for guidance to StarClan and burial." His voice was tight and strained. He was trying not to let his feelings cloud his thoughts. His pressed his muzzle into his flank and said a shirt thanks for his mentoring and stepped away for the warriors to carry him back home. Sootpaw began to think about Featherfoot. Her kits will never know their father.

Chapter Eighteen

[image]

The whole clan was out in the rain mourning their lost warrior. Only the closest to him got to lay with him: Mistytail, Sootpaw and Featherfoot, with her belly swollen with kits. Greeneyes gave a quick prayer for him, willing his spirit to StarClan. The elders covered his fur with herbs to prepare him for burial and the clan stayed in the rain while the elders buried the senior warrior. That would be Rainclaw's final resting place. But his death brought many questions with it.

Who's claws slit his throat? An enemy? Or some cat from within MoonClan?

Sootpaw couldn't think about one of his clanmates killing their family. It was against the warrior code. The sky had darkened considerably and clouds still covered the stars. Who would be Sootpaw's mentor now?

Clawstar answered his question. "Cheetahclaw, will you continue Sootpaw's warrior training?" The spotted warrior nodded briskly and padded slowly, with his head down and tail dragging in the mud, to the shaded warriors den. Snowflight and her brothers took their place beneath the entrance bush for their silent vigil and the rest of the clan dispersed to their dens. Sootpaw remained in the middle of the clearing, letting the rain wash away the tears that were streaming down his cheeks. His mentor was dead and no cat had asked how it happened. If no cat was going to say anything, he would figure it out for himself.

Then a thought struck him. 'You will have to wade through blood to win this war.'

Maybe this is the war spoken about in the prophecy? Is some cat trying to kill all of MoonClan? Sootpaw shivered at the thought. He headed towards dirtplace, and snuck out the tunnel and into the open forest. He new the territory well enough now not to get lost.

His instincts told him to go where they found his body, but he found himself at warmrocks. This was the last place he saw Rainclaw alive. Maybe he could find some clues there. The rain would be washing everything away soon.

When he arrived at warmrocks, he sniffed ever rock and every blade of grass, but nothing suggested that any battle had taken place here. No smell of a hostile warrior, just the smell of rocks and herbs. He took a peek at the river, with waves rocking about in the wind. A storm was being brought with the rain.

His paws slipped on the slick rocky surface and his body plunged into the swarming river. He would never be able swim above the waves. His only goal right now was to keep his head above the water. Cold liquid surged at him from all angles and filled his ears.

Chapter Nineteen

[image]

Water surged into his ears and mouth, making it hard to stay afloat. He thrashed his paws wildly, as if trying to attack the wet enemy. His head went under. The water was considerably less dangerous deep under.

He thought he saw a silhouette of white against the black sea, but he blinked and it was gone. Instead, there was another thing there, a black figure. There was still the faint glow of light behind the darkness, bit it was burning out. It sang a song that sounded soft and sweet. It went like this: *'now is your time to choose whether you live or die, the battle remains but your time is finished.'*

Sootpaw swam through the darkness like it was water and came face-to-face with darkness. He was disturbed by the likeness of the creature. It looked exactly like Sootpaw, right down to the tiny scar across his pink nose from a session with Mousepaw. And it mirrored all of his movements too. It was like looking at yourself through somebody else's eyes. It was a little unnerving and made his skin crawl. He turned his head to the right, and before Sootpaw even thought about it, his mirror was doing it too, or was Sootpaw the mirror. It was hard to tell, they were simply doing the same things at the same time.

His companion was being rained on now, from an invisible cloud. Water drenched his pelt and made his eyes dull. His fur was soaked now and blood trickled from a gash in his forehead. But remembering they were mirrors of each other, Sootpaw looked down at his paws. Sure enough, water flowed through his coat making it wet and heavy. Now, without Sootpaw, his shadow moved on it's own. It carried a sickly wicked smile on it's face and blood cried from it's eyes. Sootpaw tried to scream, but only a mere squeek managed to escape his throat. He skidded backwards until he was up against a rock wall, or what he thought was rock. In reality it was a wall of bone. He squeezed his eyes shut and prayed.

He wished he had stayed with the light filled cat, but it was too late. He had a feeling the darkness was taking him to the dark forest, left alone to rot and corrupt.

StarClan help me!

His ancestors must have heard his cries because he felt crisp wind through his fur. He opened his eyes and saw he was in unknown territory. The sun felt hot on his fur and he had to let his eyes adjust to the sudden brightness of the real world. He didn't know if what he had witnessed was a dream or just a hallucination, but it had seemed so real. Memories came flooding through his mind,and threatening black spots danced around his vision. He blinked them away and took a deep breath. He didn't know how long he had been in the river, but his fur was tainted with a saltiness that made his nose wrinkle. The salt made his fur stiff and sticky, and Sootpaw tried to lick of the salt, but he would have to wash it off if he really wants it gone. He didn't want to take any chances going back in the river, so he looked around. The river was behind him now, but it opened up into a dark blue pool that stretched as far as the eye could see. He was surrounded by water on three sides, so the only option was to his left. A few trees spotted the land, but they were unlike any he had ever seen before.

They had no branches into the very top, but they were short and leaves extended from their tips, long leaves, nearly big enough for a cat to nest. The trunk of the tree had visible layers going all the way up, maybe enough to climb? Some of the trees had round brown balls attacked to the leaves, and some scattered the ground. The ground was strange, too. The whole if it was sand, not a shred of grass or hard earth in sight. A single twoleg nest sat near the salty water, with a wooden path going over the water. It looked abandoned, but Sootpaw wasn't sure. He padded warily over to the fixture. A window was open, just wide enough for a cat to squeeze through. He sniffed at the opening, not scenting any twolegs, just the faint smell of dust. He pushed through the opening and found himself on a flat wooden surface. Flat sheets of white lay scattered across the surface, with a few stains on them.

He leaped from the wooden statue and onto the ground. A thick pelt-like thing covered the once hard surface, and he felt like he had

to grip the substance to stay in one place. He forced himself to keep his claws sheathed, but his heart was racing in his chest. Dust covered every surface, making his nose itch. He sneezed so violently his whole body shook. He tried not to breath in the tiny particles, but it was hard when they where everywhere.

A slight rustling in the corner of the den disturbed Sootpaw from his daydream. He parted his jaws and smelled she-cat, with a tint of fear. He turned his head slightly, not to sudden as to scare off the assumed kittypet and saw that she was a small brown cat, young by the looks of her with a single white paw and gleaming yellow eyes. She blinked twice. Her figure was tiny, and every one of her ribs were visible. Twolegs wouldn't let their pets starve would they? Sootpaw started to walk toward her, wit slow small strides and she took off running.

Sootpaw chased after her, avoiding the bulky objects littered on the floor. She darted into a room with no door and when Sootpaw entered after her, she had vanished. Her scent still lingered in the air, but Sootpaw couldn't pick it out of all the cat smells. It seemed as though there was a whole clan in just one den. He turned to flee, bit he was surrounded on all sides by hostile cats. The brown she-cat was among them. It had been a trap and Sootpaw ran straight into their claws. Now they were going to finish what the river had started.

Chapter Twenty

[image]

A small golden tom was nearest Sootpaw's face and he seemed to be the one in charge. He flicked his tail which caused every cat to sit simultaneously. Some cat's fur was still ruffled, but others fur laid flat on their shoulders. Their claws were sheathed and Sootpaw forced his fur to lie flat. If the leader was going to handle this peacefully, so would he. The golden tom squinted at the newcomer and his whiskers twitched. His amber eyes gleamed in the sun filtering through the window above a furry piece of nest. The tom spoke, but not to Sootpaw. He turned to a dark gray tom and spoke sharply, but respectfully.

"Moon, go fetch Beetle. Tell him we have a visitor."

The gray tom nodded swiftly and turned tail to find Beetle. He trotted through a small hole in the wall, just large enough for a cat. The golden cat turned his gaze back to Sootpaw and he shrunk beneath his gaze. He was small, about the size of an apprentice, but his eyes betrayed him. The gray tom returned shortly with a black tom, who smelled of herbs and fresh air. He must be the medicine cat.

Beetle scurried over to Sootpaw and prodded him in the flank with a paw. He also pressed his ear to Sootpaw's chest and listened for a heartbeat. He backed away and whispered something in the leader's ear before disappearing behind a corner. The leader, in turn, faced the newcomer again.

"Tell me, what is your name and why are you here?"

Sootpaw swallowed nervously.

"Um. I-I'm Sootpaw. The river washed me down here. I'm just trying to get home."

The gold tom's eyes narrowed suspiciously, and a dark brown tabby

spoke up.

"It's true King. I saw him on the beach a few sunrises ago. He's been there since this morning. I thought he was dead. He had no pulse."

King spat at him. "Yes thank you for your input Oscar!"

King circled Sootpaw slowly, making the fur along his spine rise. King brushed his tail gently across his shoulder.

"No pulse huh. How do you explain that *Sootpaw?"*

The black apprentice shrugged shyly. A ginger and white she-cat pushed her way through the crowd and gaped at Sootpaw.

"*Soot?* Klaus's son?" She sniffed his fur once and then pressed her muzzle against his lovingly. Sootpaw shrunk back instinctively. King's eyes flashed with anger.

"You know this *fool?*"

The she-cat nodded. "He is Klaus's son."

King looked at Sootpaw and back at the she-cat.

"Very well. Your father was a good friend, you are welcome to stay as long as you want," he turned to the ginger and white cat. "Kara, show him to his den." The she-cat smiled warmly and bounded lightly across the room through the entrance with no door. Sootpaw followed her, all instincts telling him to run, but his limbs refused to go awry.

"My name is Sootpaw now. Not Soot."

Kara made no sign that she had heard him, but her shoulder muscles tensed a little. By the time they made it to his den, Sootpaw had memorized every escape route he could find. There were multiple nests in the den, and they all smelled hostile. Kara led him to the one near the wall with no windows. A familiar scent lingered on the thick pelt spread on the floor.

"Your father stayed here often. He slept here."

Sootpaw was in no mood to talk about his father. He curled up in his nest and laid his tail over his paws. His stomach growled with hunger, but he would be able to hunt later. His legs ached and were stiff and hopefully some sleep would loosen the tension between his shoulder blades.

Chapter Twenty-One

[image]

Sootpaw woke up later, as the moon shone light through a hole in the roof. The surrounding nests were filled with sleeping cats and Sootpaw tried no to wake them as he stepped over to the hole in the wall that led to outside. He followed the sound of rushing water to the river where he had woken up earlier and layer down in the damp sand. Memories flashed in his head of the darkness and he had to open his eyes to chase away the drowning feeling. He let cold water flow over his paws and soak his belly fur as he waded deeper into the calm water. His belly rumbled, reminding him of his hunger and he backed out of the water. He couldn't see any fish in the river, so he headed near the trees. Hopefully a mouse was searching for nuts around the roots.

He was at the tree before he scented a tom close behind him. He whipped around to see a black tom with brown ears and amber-nearly red eyes. He towered over the small apprentice, thanks to his long legs. His heart pounded in his chest at the sudden fright and he faced the large tom head on.

"I was just looking for something to eat."

The black tom blinked his dark eyes and the were much lighter now. He turned around and motioned for him to follow. Sootpaw padded behind the tom and ended up at the large stretch of water. He screwed his nose at the smell of salt and had to take shallow breaths to make sure he didn't choke.

"If you look in the sand, you might find a crab."

A crab? Sootpaw twisted his face in confusion, but the tom was digging in the mushy sand with his claws. He had a decent hole and he pulled out a create with his teeth. It was huge and red and had large claws. The black and brown tom set it on the sand and placed his paw on it. He put all of his weight onto the shell and Sootpaw heard a faint crack. Thentom lifted his paw when the animal

stopped squirming. He pulled the shell off and nudged the pink slimy thing toward Sootpaw.

"Eww!"

The tom narrowed his eyes.

"My name's Thorn. You get used to the taste eventually. When you catch a crab, make sure you look out for the claws. They'll poke you in the eyes if they think they're in danger."

Sootpaw gulped down the pink flesh quickly and didn't really mind the taste, but a nice mouse would be better. He wanted to thank Thorn for catching the crab and started hunting for something for the generous tom. Moonlight bathed the salty water, making it turn white. Waves gently lapped at the sand.

"The salty water is called an ocean. The elders say it stretches forever."

Thorn had followed Sootpaw near the trees. He was trying to get to one of the round brown things hanging from the branches. Thorn said they were coconuts and very hard to come by. Once they dropped, they were no good. Some cats had even died climbing the tree. Now it was Sootpaw's turn.

He fastened his claws into the tough bark and edged his way up. Halfway to the top and he nearly lost his footing. His heart nearly leaped from his chest but he held on to the tree. He looked down and saw Thorn looking up at him nervously. His tail tip was twitching uncontrollably and his eyes reflected the moon. Sootpaw took a deep breath and carried on, going inch by inch up the trunk of the coconut tree. He reached the leaves of the tree and reached his claws to the coconut the dangled from it. It was just out of his reach. He edged closer and tried again, keeping three pairs of claws latched into the bark. He sliced the stem, making the fruit come crashing down. Thorn caught it between his paws before it fell to the ground.

Sootpaw was too early to celebrate. He misjudged the distance between where he was and the next notch and came crashing from

the tree. He screeched loudly and landed with an 'oof' on the packed sand. Thorn was next to him in an instant. Beetle had also come running into the night, with King just behind him. A throbbing pain inflicted his hind leg, and he couldn't move it.

StarClan don't let it be broken!

Beetle prodded his leg with his paw and Sootpaw had to stifle his cries. The black tom sighed with a mixture of fear and relief.

"It's not broken. But it is out of place. I'll have to reset it, and it will hurt."

Thorn bounded away and returned a heartbeat later with a stick. He placed it in the apprentices mouth to bite on when the pain came. Beetle placed his paws on opposite sides of his leg and took a deep breath. Then, with one swift moment pushed his leg back into it's socket. The stick snapped between Sootpaw's teeth, but his leg felt better.

"You will need to rest. Thorn, take him to my den will you."

Thorn grabbed Sootpaw's scruff between his teeth and trotted back inside, careful to keep his hurt leg away from the ground. King padded over to the coconut Sootpaw had managed to knock down and rolled it behind them. Beetle helped open the window wider for entrance. King pushed the furry fruit through a home in another wall, for every cat to share. Sootpaw was taken to Beetle's den, which was similar to Greeneyes' den. It smelled of herbs and fowl plants.

Chapter Twenty-Two

[image]

Beetle was digging through piles of leaves and retreated with a tiny seed in his mouth.

"Here, eat this poppy seed. It will dull the pain and help you sleep. I'll make sure you get to taste what made you fall too."

Sootpaw felt his face go red, but licked up the seeds willingly. The pain in his leg was now a dull aching sensation, and his eyelids were heavy. He let the dark swallow him into unconsciousness. His mind felt prickly, like some cat was poking it with a stick and Sootpaw opened his eyes. He knew instantly that he was dreaming.

He was greeted by a white she-cat with pale blue eyes. *Whitefur!*

He purred a greeting, but it was not reciprocated. Instead, Whitefur bounded lightly down the rocky terrain. Sootpaw had to leap from the stars super fast because the she-cat was hurrying, like she was going somewhere. Or someone was chasing her. Whitefur waited for him at the bottom of the gorge and Sootpaw met her there. He had no time to catch his breath because the deceased warrior paced forward, towards a large hole in the cliff face of the gorge. She walked up the small ledge and entered the gaping hole and her bright pelt was swallowed by black. Sootpaw hesitated before following her. He had to let his eyes adjust to the darkness before he could see anything.

He could make out the shape of a cat, with two whining bundles next to her. It was a queen and her kits. His eyes had adjusted and he could see that the queen was Featherfoot. He jumped at the smell of blood. Her two kits, both she-cat and very silver, like herself were small and looked very weak. Light was shed on two more clunks of fur. Two toms with black and white fur. They smelled of death. Whitefur turned to Sootpaw.

"While you sleep, your clanmates are dying. You mist go home

now, before it is too late."

Had Featherfoot kitted already? She didn't look very plump when he had left, bit he didn't know how long he had been passed out beside the river. He had been conscious for two days now, and asleep for even more. *I guess it is time to go home...*

StarClan fades to black and was replaced by Beetle's den. A small ball of moss lay next to his muzzle, soaked in water and a slice of coconut was to the side. Beetle was in the corner moving things around. Sootpaw lapped up the water and took a bit of the white flesh of the coconut. He still couldn't move his keg very well, but with some exercise it would be moveable and he could go home. He tried sitting up, but his leg sat uncomfortably at his side. It didn't hurt, but it was uncomfortable.

Beetle turned to him and padded over to him. Sootpaw had finished the meat of the coconut, it was actually pretty good. And Beetle dragged it away. Lily, the brown she-cat padded in and took the moss ball from his side. Sootpaw tried to stand, but his leg buckled from beneath him and he laid down again. He was going to be here for a little while longer.

He had been sitting in his nest for nearly the whole day when Beetle had suggested he take a walk. He called for Midnight, a gray tabby and she let him lean against her shoulder. He could feel the muscles rippling beneath her patchy pelt, and her eyes showed age. She must be retiring soon. *Or did they never retire?* Regardless, she was old. Once, they both nearly tossled over.

Chapter Twenty-Three

[image]

The next day, his leg felt much better and didn't slouch awkwardly beside his body. He could step on it too, but only for a while before giving out. Time ticked on and Sootpaw grew more worried about Featherfoot and her kits. He wouldn't let them die.

Night time had come and his hosts were snuggled up in their beds, ready for a good nights sleep. Sootpaw would have to leave soon, or miss the opportunity. He sneaked silently into the night, ignoring the stabbing pain in his hind leg and forced himself to go on. He would have to cross the river eventually to get to MoonClan territory, but that could wait. For now, he just needed to get away from the beach. He headed for the forest where the trees made him feel safe. He was beneath the treetops before he realized he was being followed. He stopped to rest beneath an oak tree and prepared to be pulled back to the ocean. The cat following him was Thorn.

The tom strayed from behind the bush he was hiding behind and stepped into the moonlight. Sootpaw breathed a sigh of relief. Surely his friend wouldn't sell him out? Thorn sheepishly looked behind him before approaching the MoonClan apprentice.

"What are you doing? Are you going back home? Can I come too?"

Sootpaw rolled his eyes.

"A clan is no place for kittypet or loners."

He didn't forget about his birth and his lack of clan blood, but what if Clawstar refused to let him stay? He would have to send Thorn away and he wasn't prepared for that.

Thorn's head hung for a second but bounced up excitedly.

"Maybe your leader will let me stay if I take you home safe. Surely he would be grateful?"

Sootpaw murmured something under his breath but Thorn ignored his attempts at making him stay. Sootpaw for back to his paws and limped behind Thorn.

"We need to stay ahead of any searching parties. Come on, follow me."

He led the way through the forest, staying close to the river as a guide. The stream seemed to run straight through the earth and never stopped. He knew the other end must've ended at another ocean, but there was no way of knowing.

Thorn bounded happily in front of the limping tom, and stopped every few fox lengths for Sootpaw to catch up. This went on for a while, before Sootpaw's body hurt from the walking. He was short of breath and his leg was starting to buckle. He looked around for shelter and saw a hole low in the trunk of a cedar tree. He motioned Thorn over with a flick of his tail and dragged himself over to the opening. He sniffed the inside, and sensing no danger, crawled inside making room for his friend. Thorn reminded him of Nightwatcher, the long legs and bright attitude. It was like they were related. Thorn was about the same age as Sootpaw, maybe a couple of moons older, but young enough to still be an apprentice. Thorn kept his head outside of the tree, keep in watch as Sootpaw slept. He would take the next watch.

Thorn prodded Sootpaw's shoulder. *Is it my turn to keep watch already?* Dawn sunlight filtered through tiny holes in the tree bark, and Sootpaw looked out at the sun. Thorn had watched all night. He still had that little flame in his eyes though. He jumped out of the makeshift den and stretched his legs. Sootpaw did the same, keeping an eye on his injured leg. It would be healed already if he had stayed in bed. He could smell other cats, which meant they were getting close to somecat's territory.

Filler.

[image]

I will be stopping this book during the next chapter or so. But, then that frown upside down! There will be a second book, and it will be called Book Two: Finding Home. Be on the lookout for the first chapter and make sure to vote and suggest me to friends. Some feedback would be nice too!

Toodles!

—Salamander132631

Chapter Twenty-Four

[image]

Thorn and Sootpaw padded onward, and Sootpaw could smell a clan cat, he recognized it as DropClan. MoonClan territory would be much farther upland. Now they would just have to make it through enemy lands back home. Plus, they still needed to cross the river. Sootpaw wasn't sure of his leg was going to let him jump over the rushing water, but he would have to hope for the best.

Thorn still bounced around really hyper, even though he hadn't gotten any sleep last night. Sootpaw guessed he had to do something with his energy or else he would explode. At least he would never get tired of doing things. Sootpaw thought about what Kara had said about his father. He must've gone there after his birth, because she knew his name. But it was like she recognized him from how he looked. He was sure he had never seen him before, but she had definitely seen *him* before.

He shook his head from those thoughts and focused on the ground beneath his paws. They were still in DropClan territory, getting into DesertClan territory. There would be less water in the river while they walked through the hot sandy desert that DesrtClan cats called home. They were adapted to the heat, so it didn't harm them, but it caused other cats to be dehydrated quicker which makes them weak. After DesrtClan, they would need to go through ClawClan, and then NightClan. After that they would be safe at camp. So long as they didn't run into any patrols.

"We should hurry before we run into a patrol."

Thorn didn't ask any questions and he quickened his pace. But Sootpaw feared he had spoken too soon. He smelled the hostile scent of DesertClan cats before they appeared from behind a tall cactus with a single pink flower on it. There were five of them, and he recognized all of them from the one gathering he had been to: Streakpelt, Dewpelt, Whitenose, Birdpaw and Meerkatmask. They approached the two intruders slowly, and Birdpaw had his hackles

raised. He had been talking to Steamclaw at the gathering.

Birdpaw lowered them with a strict look from Dewpelt. From the looks of it, Streakpelt was leading the patrol. He seemed super nice at the gathering, maybe he would let them go easy. Meerkatmask took the back if the patrol and Whitenose, Birdpaw and Dewpelt spread out in a line, pushing the two toms against the river bed. Streakpelt stepped forward, eyeing the apprentice and his friend. He spoke with an edge to his voice, like he was angry, but it was subtle enough.

"Who are you and what are you doing on DesertClan territory?"

Sootpaw opened his mouth to speak, but Thorn beat him to it. He spoke quick and was right to the point.

"I am Thorn and this is Sootpaw." He paused looking at Sootpaw momentarily. "We are heading to MoonClan, so we are just heading through."

Streakpelt nodded briskly, and motioned for Birdpaw, Dewpelt and Meerkatmask to head back to camp. They bounded over the hot sand and towards their home. Whitenose stepped forward to stand next to Streakpelt, and they were shoulder to shoulder.

"We will escort you to the ClawClan border."

Streakpelt took the lead and Whitenose followed more slowly. The black and white tom stood out clearly beside the golden sand, but Meerkatmask, along with most DesertClan cats were very pale in color. Whitenose and Streakpelt were the exception. The few who were easily spotted among the sand specialized with herbs or fighting. That way ever cat had a job to do.

The cats padded along in silence, until Sootpaw smelled the scent marker. Streakpelt stopped and stepped aside to let the two cats pad forward, into ClawClan territory. Spruce trees were popping up and a forest grew before long and Sootpaw stayed as close to the river as he could.

Chapter Twenty-Five

[image]

Sootpaw and Thorn made it to the border of ClawClan and NightClan at nightfall. Thorn had spotted a large cave in a hill just at the scent marker and the two toms huddled together for warmth. Leaf-fall was coming and the weather would be cold and food scarce. It was warmer at the beach, and prey was plentiful, but Sootpaw would rather go home to his clan than be well fed. No cat should have an easy life, like a *kittypet*.

Sootpaw was pulled into a dreamless sleep and woke before dawn. Thorn was still snoring, and Sootpaw nudged him awake with a paw. He woke with a start, as if disturbed from a dream. Then he seemed to realize where he was and got up to stretch. Sootpaw waited impatiently for him to be ready to set off again. A ClawClan patrol would be coming to freshen the scent marker soon and Sootpaw didn't want to run into any hostile cats.

They made it out before they could meet a patrol and Sootpaw thanked StarClan for that. Now they would just need to run across the small part of NightClan territory, which was treeless, and they would be in the clear. Sootpaw's belly rumbled, reminding him of his growing hunger. He ran towards the river and sat down heavily. Thorn landed with a thump next to him and he kept watch while Sootpaw hunted. He managed to catch three minnows, enough for the two of them. They downed their prey and continued their journey.

It was sunhigh before Sootpaw saw the start of MoonClan territory, and he bounded excitedly for the last few fox lengths. Thorn was behind him, keeping an eye on the apprentice's leg. Sootpaw felt the pain that came in waves every time he put pressure on his foot, but he had to get home. He landed lightly on the first stepping stone, then the next, with Thorn following just behind. Sootpaw landed with a wince of the bank of the river. He breathed a deep breath of air and relished in the familiar scent.

A twig snapping behind him made him whip around. He faced a black and white tom with sturdy shoulders and glowing eyes.

"What are you—Sootpaw?"

Flashpaw's eyes widened in surprise, and he smiled a big goofy smile. He hopped on his hind legs and leaped onto his brothers back, making him roll over. His hind legs scrabbled at the edge of the river, and he shoved Flashpaw off.

"Thorn, this is my brother Flashpaw. Flashpaw, this is Thorn. *A friend."*

Flashpaw dismissed Thorn's greeting, and pelted full speed toward camp. Sootpaw tried to follow, but he limped awkwardly on his hurt leg. Thorn stayed wit him to make sure he stayed up, but Flashpaw had raced away. He was probably going to warn the others about his return.

When Sootpaw strolled through the entrance, his clanmates surrounded him with purrs and meows of greetings. Sootpaw pushed his way through the crowd and pushed on to the nursery. He looked through the entrance and saw Featherfoot grooming herself. Her belly was so swollen, it looked like she had *eaten* kits instead of becoming pregnant. She purred a greeting at the apprentice and he sighed a sigh of relief. She was safe and so were her unborn kits. *For now.*

He backed out the way he had come in and saw his clanmates staring at Thorn with a suspicious gleam in their eyes. Clawstar was among them.

He walked over to his clan leader and whispered in his ear.

"Thorn helped me get back home. He wishes to stay. Will you let him?"

Clawstar said nothing, but recognition flashed in his eyes. Sootpaw backed away and was about to tell Thorn he should leave when a yowl of pain broke out in the clearing. Sootpaw knew it had come from the nursery, and Greeneyes and Oatwhisker ran

hurriedly towards the den. The crying died down and the clan dissapated from the clearing, leaving Thorn, Sootpaw and Clawstar alone. Thorn had his head bowed, and Clawstar was examining him.

"Do you know how to hunt? In a forest I mean."

Thorn smiled slyly.

"I specialize in crabs, but yes, I can hunt am on a forest. I would obey the warrior code if you let me stay! I'll do anything! Please don't make me go back..."

Clawstar looked from Sootpaw to Thorn and sighed.

"I have let so many cats into my clan this season, the camp will be full before long... But I guess we could find some room. You will have to gain an apprentice name and have a proper mentor tough. And leafbare will be hard and you may go hungry."

It sounded as tough he was trying to drive Thorn away by making clan life seem so bad. He hoped Thorn would stand his ground and not back out. As he hoped, Thorn complied to the statement and bowed his head eagerly.

"Let all cats old enough to yowl gather beneath the high ledge for a clan meeting."

Most of the clan had gathered in the clearing already, but some warriors and the elders, Nutwhisker and Copperpelt padded slowly out of their den and sat in the back of the herd.

"Along with the return of one of our apprentices," Clawstar's gaze landed on Sootpaw before he continued. "He has brought home a potential warrior. Thorn, from now on, until you earn your warrior name, you shall be called Thornpaw. Your mentor will be Darkfur."

After the ceremony, Sootpaw walked over to the nursery and peeked inside. Featherfoot and her four healthy kits: Pebblekit,

Stormkit, Hazekit and Mintkit. He smiled warmly at the she-cat and her kits, and memories of her dead kittens flashed through his mind. He blinked them away and reminded himself of how happy they looked.

To Be Continued...

Filler-ish

Okay. So that was the last chapter of this book. But not to fear! The second book in the series will be coming out soon. Be sure to keep your eyes open for that, and it will be called Finding Home. @McCall_Me_Lilypool is making me a book cover, and I am writing as you read this. :)

Continue

[image] [image]

I would really like it if you took the time to read my other books, and I am now taking short story requests. Don't forget to vote and suggest me to your friends/followers. Enjoy!